

Charismats and Catalysts

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Eros and (Religious) Education

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When I'm teaching, I care about my socks.

I typically teach small groups of 8-16 students at Brandeis, which gives me the luxury of conducting a class like a seminar rather than a formal lecture. When I walk into the classroom, the students are seated at small movable tables that are arranged in a rectangle, mimicking a large seminar table. I go to the front of the room and move one table back, out of the rectangle, leaving the other tables in the shape of a U. I position my chair in the opening of the U. I don't want to be sitting behind a table, much less standing behind a podium. I want to be more exposed, more accessible. And when I sit comfortably in the chair, with my legs crossed, I know that they can see my colorful socks. I'm counting on it.

Some of my fellow academics might raise an eyebrow at this description. Lila Corwin Berman reports that a well-known professor has been known to remark to his graduate students that he "has no biography, only bibliography." His quip captures the ideal of the academic as disembodied intellect, devoid of personal commitments other than the commitment to truth and objectivity.

But even if we do not go so far as to deny our embodied, historically embedded selves, why should it matter where or how I sit, much less what my socks look like? Surely, my critics would say, my job is to teach, not to impress the students with my sartorial choices. I seem far too concerned with superficial matters. I should be spending more time preparing the material, or designing instructional strategies to promote student engagement. In fact, some might worry that, in focusing on the impression that I make on students, in wanting them not just to notice my socks but somehow to like me because of them – because of my socks?!? – I am demonstrating a dangerous degree of ego-centrism. This suggests that I am interested in gathering groupies rather than cultivating independent, critical thinkers.

¹ This paper, and my thinking on the subject, have been influenced by Deborah Beck, Susan P. Fendrick, Ziva Reimer Hassenfeld, and Dan Smokler, none of whom of course are responsible for what I write.

Some might notice, too, the white male privilege inherent in my stance. I can walk into a room and assume a position of vulnerability and accessibility, confident that, in the end, the students will defer to me. I can attend to little things like my socks because, if things go awry, if the students become too comfortable with me, if they challenge the norms of inquiry and engagement that I propose to them, I can fall back on my authority. Since I don't need my clothing to signal that authority, I can use my sartorial choices for other purposes.

On the other hand, there is another perspective on teaching that we ought to consider. "I am convinced," the scholar of literature Elaine Marks once wrote, "that desire is the central force in teaching, a force that can be dangerous if it is not recognized and controlled but without which the language and literature classroom is a dry and boring place."² Kathleen Hull, an instructor in philosophy and religion at NYU, would agree:

It seems to me that cultivating students' desires and loves is central to our task as teachers, involving the forming and shaping of their affects, appetites, and longings.³

To be sure, Marks and Hull are not talking here about the choice of hosiery. They are observing, rather, that our goals in teaching seem to involve both building on and cultivating a set of emotional connections. They are rejecting the ideal of a cold, dispassionate environment, governed only by the intellect without room for emotion, for passion, for desire. This calls to mind the oft-cited rabbinic proverb, "Jealousy among scholars increases wisdom" (Bava Batra 21b), which calls our attention to the role of motivation—even less-than-pure emotions like jealousy—in the pursuit of cognitive achievement. But Marks and Hull go beyond this point. It is not only the case that emotion plays a role in intellectual pursuits for the student. It is also the case, they argue, that the establishment of an emotional connection between teacher and student is fundamental to learning.

And so, perhaps it is not too hard to imagine that they would welcome the attention that I am giving to the emotional climate of my classroom. If enjoying the professor's socks opens the heart to the formation of deeper and nobler desires, perhaps it is not so superficial after all.

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² Quoted in *The Erotics of Instruction*, Regina Barreca and Deborah Denenolz Morse, eds., Hanover and London: University of New England Press, 1997, p.47.

³ Kathleen Hull, "Eros and Education: The Role of Desire in Teaching and Learning," *NEA Higher Education Journal/Thought and Action*, Fall 2002, 19-31.

So the issue is more complicated than it may seem at first. Consider the following description of a professor of Bible from a study that I carried out a number of years ago, comparing his university teaching to his teaching in a Jewish adult education class. In these paragraphs, I am describing the professor's introductory lecture in a university course that I call "Bible 101."

When [the professor, whom we may call "Moshe"] gets to the topic of gender, he pauses to acknowledge that some of the passages may be offensive. He then offers a comment that seems to be a kind of signature line, because he repeats the exact same line in [his adult education class]: "I *teach* the Bible. I did not *write* the Bible. I am not *responsible* for all of the thoughts that the Bible contains" (emphasis in the original).

The line works. It's funny and elicits laughter from the students after the second sentence. It defuses the discomfort in encountering these texts, or at least diminishes that discomfort, and it may inoculate Moshe himself from the students' feelings as they encounter the texts. It accomplishes this by setting up the Bible as a text from which Moshe is able to establish some critical distance.

And of course he's recommending that the students establish some critical distance as well. Moshe is passionate about the text, and has committed his life to the study of it; he hopes that the students will be able to see that such a life of study is a legitimate option. But he is not responsible for it (or, he is not responsible for all of it). He reserves the right to disavow the text or some aspect of the text. The students should be able to see that that, too, is a legitimate option.⁴

There is nothing here about Moshe's socks or any other sartorial choices. This is a much more substantive issue: an interpretive stance towards the text exemplified by Moshe's denial of responsibility for the contents of the Bible. That denial of responsibility enables the possibility of ethical critique, even as Moshe remains intimately connected to the Bible, a text which he has devoted his life to studying and teaching.

My argument is focused on the fact that what I'm calling Moshe's "signature line," his denial of responsibility for the contents of the Bible, is voiced in the first person. This is not a coincidence. Moshe is providing the students with an image of a stance that they can take, if they choose to do so, and not just a

⁴ Jon A. Levisohn, "Introducing the Contextual Orientation to Bible: A Comparative Study," *Journal of Jewish Education* 74:1, 2008.

generic stance but a specific stance towards this text. He is modeling a way of being in the world. And he is not just offering that image, but indeed recommending it to them.

Moshe would never accept the notion that he is or ought to be a “role model” for his students. He does not claim to be a paragon of virtue, and may well reject the demands that role modeling might place on him. “Role modeling became a mixed blessing,” writes Erica Brown, in a reflection on her own experience as a religious educator of young adults. “It provided a powerful incentive to stay within the parameters of my own highest ideals. But it also ate away at the freedom I needed to express my individuality.”⁵ For an academic like Moshe, that freedom is precious, which is why the idea of being of a role model is frightening. Nevertheless, in the specific sense described above, he functions as one.

Part of what we do, then, when we teach, is that we present our students with images of a possible life. This is not necessarily a total set of life choices, of course. Perhaps the phrase “a way of being in the world,” which I used above, is too broad. But even when we are teaching a particular subject, we are teaching a stance towards that subject, and like Moshe, implicitly or explicitly, consciously or unconsciously, we are recommending that stance to them. We are saying, “You can be like me, if you want”—whether “like me” means “a professor like me” or “a philosopher like me” or “a reader of ancient Near Eastern texts like me” or even, perhaps, “a Jew like me.”

As Parker Palmer writes on the first page of *The Courage to Teach*, “We teach who we are.”⁶ We teach ourselves. It is not exactly right to say that we want our students to become like us—because we value autonomy, we are suspicious of mimicry, and we recognize that there are many forms of human flourishing—but it is not exactly wrong, either.

And if this is the case in academic settings, then *kal va-homer*, how much the more so, when we are teaching in religious settings, where our pedagogic and curricular choices are meant to serve the goal of spiritual formation. Ralph Waldo Emerson once scribbled in his journal that “the whole secret of the teacher’s force lies in the conviction that men are convertible.”⁷ He was not talking about religious education *per se*, but his religious metaphor –

⁵ Erica Brown, “Sincerity and Authenticity in Teaching,” *Torah U'Madda Journal*, Vol. 11 (2002-2003), available online at <<http://www.lookstein.org/articles/brown.htm>>. Brown continues by insightfully describing the porous boundary between subject and teacher: “When we teach history and learn lessons about tolerance, we expect that the history teacher himself be tolerant. When we study English literature with a teacher who highlights the nuances of human interaction between protagonists, we expect that she herself will be sensitive in the arena of human communication. No one asked if this expectation is fair; it is enough to say that it is present.”

⁶ Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (1998).

⁷ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson: An Organic Anthology*, ed. Stephen E. Whicher (1957), p. 16, quoted in Hull.

conversion – is notable. The teacher must know, he is saying, that the student standing before her is capable of radical growth, radical transformation. This

belief, that the student can become other than she is, is what energizes the teacher's work.

Emerson then continues: "And they are [i.e., they are indeed capable of being converted]. They want awakening. Get the soul out of bed, out of her deep habitual sleep..."⁸ The language of "awakening the soul" is certainly familiar to religious educators, who typically are less concerned with the transmission of information or the training in particular skills, and more concerned with cultivating a certain way of being in the world: a mode of attunement, or appreciation, or spiritual focus. Indeed, if we take Emerson seriously, we will have to come to terms with the possibility that teaching *without* awakening the soul from her slumber is not teaching at all.

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This brings us to the role of Eros. Some would argue that Eros has no place in education, nor in educational theory. Can we not simply distinguish between role-modeling, even the appropriate use of charisma, on the one hand, and an erotic connection on the other? Can we not simply rule out the erotic as inherently inappropriate, inherently dangerous and unstable? We can try to make such a distinction, but we may be blinding ourselves to some deeper psychological truths.

In his classic essay "Eros and Education," the great educational theorist Joseph J. Schwab calls Eros "the energy of wanting," and writes that it "is as much the energy source in the pursuit of truth as it is in the motion toward pleasure, friendship, fame, or power."⁹ We typically think about wanting these other things (pleasure, friendship, etc. – and especially power), and not just wanting them but *desiring* them, implicitly calling upon a theory of the self in which we are each made up of bundles of arational desires that are dangerously animalistic in nature and in need of being held in check by reason or morality. But truth, Schwab claims, is also the object of desire. There is an "energy of wanting" that is directed towards our own learning, our own growth and development. Eros, in other words, is a mechanism or instrument of learning.

Moreover, he continues, Eros is present in our conception of the desired

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Joseph J. Schwab, "Eros and Education: A Discussion of One Aspect of Discussion (1954)," in *Science, Curriculum, and Liberal Education: Selected Essays*, Ian Westbury and Neil J. Wilkof, eds., 1978, p. 109.

outcome of education, the end of education as well as the means. “The outcome of a successful liberal curriculum,” he writes, “is *actively* intelligent people.”¹⁰ Why the emphasis on the adverb? Because he wants us to be thinking about a kind of empowered, autonomous person who embodies an active stance in the world, not just a person who knows things but a person who *does* things.

He continues:

They *like* good pictures, good books, good music, good movies. They *find pleasure* in planning their active lives and carrying out the planned action. They hanker to make, to create, whether the object is knowledge mastered, art appreciated, or actions patterned and directed.¹¹

Schwab’s use of the verb “hanker” reminds us that this essay is more than sixty years old, but the depiction of the desired outcome of a healthy and robust education is anything but dated. The contemporary focus on design thinking, as well as the construction of “maker spaces” in educational environments, build on precisely this impulse to emphasize *doing* and *being* and *caring*, not just knowing.¹² Schwab’s point is that all of this activity requires motivation, wanting, desire – in short, Eros, and not just Eros in general but erotic attraction to, or desire for, the best and highest things. “In short, a curriculum is not complete which does not move the Eros, as well as the mind of the young, from where it is to where it might better be.”¹³

So as educators, we must, it seems, play in the playground of Eros. How do we do this? The first step, according to Schwab, is to establish a connection of genuine liking and respect. He writes about mundane pedagogic actions like looking students in the eye, and responding patiently and meaningfully to their gestures. These and other gestures can form the basis for a connection. But this is not yet where the education happens. Once some connection has been made, the real work begins.

[The educator] is now to use [Eros] to evoke in students a drive to emulate his professional activity and interest... He is to convert liking and respect for his person into pleasure in practicing what he is and does as a liberally educated person. This is to say that, ultimately, the student’s Eros is disengaged from the person of the teacher and

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, emphasis in the original.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, emphasis in the original.

¹² Of course, knowing can also be considered a form of doing and caring, as John Dewey taught. I will return to this point below.

¹³ *Ibid.*

fastened upon those qualities and capacities which make any man complete. The Eros, in this last state, is attached to the qualities and the capacities in their own right, and not as qualities and capacities of the teacher. The student learns to like them ... because they are good, to enjoy their exercise, and to desire them for himself. The student who remains attached to the teacher ... has not been taught so much as he has been enslaved.¹⁴

What Schwab is describing here is a kind of psychological transference, but one in which Eros is transferred from the initial object of desire, the teacher, to the secondary object of desire, the “qualities or capacities” of the teacher, “what he is and does.” In our example above, we might say that the student is supposed to go from feeling some emotional connection to (or even, in some sense, desire for) Moshe himself to an emotional connection to and desire for the ideals that Moshe represents, the intellectual stance that he embodies.

By the end of the paragraph cited, it is clear why Schwab wants and needs this transference to occur. When the student remains in an erotic relationship to the teacher, rather than to what the teacher represents, the student has not achieved the kind of autonomy that we associate with full personhood. The potential for abuse is ever-present. The teacher’s job, we might say, is to make herself dispensable, because the student has successfully internalized what the teacher has to offer. The teacher’s goal should be to actually be dispensed with.

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This approach to the problem – to argue that the goal is simply to shift the focus from the teacher to the subject – is a familiar one. Good and ethical teachers, we sometimes hear, teach Torah, rather than teaching themselves. “In the ‘Pied Piper’ situation a powerfully charismatic teacher has exceeded appropriate boundaries,” writes Paul Shaviv, in a wise and sobering chapter on the topic, written from the perspective of an experienced school leader. “The teacher’s personality has become the centre of the classroom rather than the course content.”¹⁵

And yet, this way of framing the problem seems a bit too schematic. It ignores the kind of role-modeling discussed above, the modeling of a stance towards a particular subject as a possible option for students. Moreover, returning to Schwab, students do not simply progress from liking the teacher to liking the

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 116-7.

¹⁵ Paul Shaviv, “The Charismatic Teacher,” in *The Jewish High School: A Complete Management Guide* (2009). Also see Aryeh Klapper, “Charisma” (2010), available at <www.torahleadership.org/categories/charisma.pdf>.

subject, as Schwab seems to propose that they do.

First, the interpersonal connection is not transcended. It should be clear that I am talking about healthy teacher-student relationships here, not abusive and boundary-crossing ones. But in those healthy relationships, the teacher is not left behind, like a ladder that the student has used to climb up to the loft. If the student remains under the sway of a charismatic teacher, unable to chart her own course, that is profoundly worrisome, but surely there are more moderate and healthier teacher-student relationships that are ongoing, rather than transcended. If we interrogate our own experience, I suspect that many of us can think of teachers to whom we remain attached, whom we have not discarded, but with no hint of enslavement.

And second, relatedly, what Schwab misses in the paragraph above is the way in which teacher and student can be engaged in a shared inquiry, with a shared object of desire. To reframe the point in terms of apprenticeship, the apprentice may begin with affection for the master, and may grow from that point to appreciate the artistry and craftsmanship of the master. But there is also room for a joint project, a shared production of a work that embodies their now-shared ideals. In this model, the mature relationship is not one in which the apprentice tosses the master aside and proceeds on her own, but rather, one in which they work side-by-side.

In fact, Schwab later articulates exactly this point. He considers those moments when a parent and child work together on a task. “If the task is ‘real,’ that is, if it embodies creation of something admirable or useful to others, the experience involved becomes the most complete of which the young is capable.”¹⁶ He then continues by describing what it can look or feel like when parent and child are aligned in this way, anticipating the concept of “flow” developed by Mihaly Csíkszentmihályi in the 1970s:

The feeling experienced can be atomized into a sense of the smooth flow of muscle and movement, a sense of increased stature (the child literally feels himself taller) and of increased clarity and scope of vision, hearing, and touch... The experience comes as a smooth flow of creative volition in which the makers, the object being made, and the materials and action of its construction become one organic and unfolding whole. It is the experience for the child of the growth of its ego, of its capacity for Eros.¹⁷

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* For Csíkszentmihályi, see *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety: Experiencing Flow in Work and Play* (1975). In David Hawkins' classic essay “I Thou and It” from 1967 (republished in his *The Informed Vision: Essays on Learning and Human Nature*, 1974), Hawkins describes the same phenomenon, in which teacher and student are engaged in a joint project. His term is “engrossment.”

Schwab subsequently explains how the parent-child relationship can be a model for the teacher-student relationship (and also notes some limitations on the comparison). But the key point is that the state of flow depicted here is one suffused with Eros, with desire, with intrinsic motivation, with “volition,” from both the adult and the child, all in harmony as “one organic and unfolding whole.” And what is particularly notable, here, is that Eros is not simply re-directed from the parent to the project, as he had suggested earlier. Instead, Schwab depicts a harmonious triangular system, consisting of parent, child, and project. That project is the object of desire for both of them, even as there is a continuing affective relationship between child and parent (in both directions).

The third point in the triangle is not a mere formality. It is not simply something that is other than the parent or teacher, as if the student (and the student’s Eros) just needs to be distracted by something shiny. In David Hawkins’ formulation, the triangle is composed of an I (the teacher), a Thou (the student), and an It (the subject matter, or the object of inquiry). He writes, “The direct object must be something treasured which is not I, and not Thou.”¹⁸ It must be something which is not I and not thou, but also, significantly, it must be “treasured”: valued, desirable and desired.

Parker Palmer’s term for Hawkins’ “It” is folksy and unassuming: it is simply a “third thing.” But his language about this third thing is lofty. Our pedagogic environments, he writes, need “a transcendent third thing that holds both me and thee accountable to something beyond ourselves...”¹⁹

How does this work? What does it mean that the third thing holds us accountable? He continues:

[In certain classrooms,] the third thing has a presence so real, so vivid, so vocal, that it can hold teacher and student alike accountable for what they say and do.... The great thing is so alive that teacher can turn to student or student to teacher, and either can make a claim on the other in the name of that great thing. Here, teacher and students have a power beyond themselves to contend with—the power of a subject that transcends our self-absorption...²⁰

What Palmer is describing, here, is what happens when teacher and student are committed to the integrity of their inquiry. They care enough about the object that

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹⁹ Palmer, *Courage to Teach*, p. 119. It is also worth noting that the concept of the instructional triangle, of teacher-student-subject, has become widespread in a certain tradition of educational scholarship, beginning with a triangular diagram in David Cohen and Deborah Ball, “*Instruction, Capacity, and Improvement*” (1999). Cohen and Ball acknowledge the relationship to Hawkins and others.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

they're trying to understand, or the problem that they're trying to solve, that they will not dare to make a false claim or do shoddy work. And this dynamic has a democratizing effect, because within the bounds of the inquiry or the project, the student is permitted—or actually obligated—to speak up against the teacher if she believes that an argument is flawed or a move misguided.

The passage from Schwab referred to “makers” and “materials,” which might have misled us into thinking that the shared object of focus has to be a hands-on project, as when the parent and child (or teacher and student) build a birdhouse or fix a car engine. This is hardly the case. Any inquiry is a form of “doing.” Any focus of attention, any text or problem, has the potential to be a shared project. Palmer describes quite vividly the dynamic in any pedagogic context where we take the third thing seriously, where it is “real” and “vivid” and “alive,” whether that third thing is a project, a problem, or a text.

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We have all experienced flow in conversation with another person, when we are aligned in our interests – the interest of having the conversation, of engaging with the other person around the topic of shared inquiry and genuine shared concern. We're trying to figure it out together, whatever the “it” happens to be.

That, indeed, can be a model for religious education. We are all trying to figure it out together. For some, the religious quest is a search for enlightenment or discernment. Others are in pursuit of virtue, of godliness, of living the life that God wants or demands of us, or fulfilling God's will for us in the world. And for some, religious quest is nothing less than seeking direct experience and relationship, cleaving to the Divine.

But within any of these variations—which, it should be clear, mark both distinctions between religious traditions but also variations *within* religious traditions—in that moment when we are all trying to figure it out together, what we are modeling, as teachers, is what it looks like and feels like to pursue that project.

Hull calls this “a teaching model in which the object is to nurture the construction of a desiring self.”²¹ Brown describes “a process or journey which [the teacher] herself is still engaged in and to which she invites the student to join.”²² Again, this “journeying” or “desiring” may be glossed as pursuing an ideal, or striving to fulfill God's will as we understand it, or seeking a direct experience. This is the

²¹ Hull, p. 24.

²² Brown, n.p.

connection between teaching oneself, on the one hand, and Schwab's and Hawkins' and Palmer's triangle, on the other.

We are playing in the playground of Eros, but we are not simply transferring the student's Eros from ourselves as teachers to the subject. We too are playing in the playground. We are also acknowledging our own Eros, our own desiring selves, our own questions and quests. We offer up this "third thing" to the student not as a mere curiosity, but as an object of our own passion. We are saying, "You can be like me, if you want"—but to be like me, in this model, is not primarily to know what I know or act like I act, but to desire what I desire, or to desire in the way that I desire.

However, this only works if the question, or the quest, is genuine. If the teacher has all the answers, or even if he *believes* that he has all the answers, then whatever it is that he actually desires—the object of the teacher's Eros—is not the same as the object of the student's Eros. There is no triangle, no shared "It," no "third thing" as the focus of the pedagogic community. Certainly there is nothing that, in Palmer's striking phrase, "holds teacher and student alike accountable for what they say and do." The student desires knowledge, wisdom, understanding. The teacher? Who knows. Maybe it's power, or servitude of his fragile ego. But whatever it is, it is clearly not aligned with the object of the student's Eros.²³

On the other hand, if the teacher is on a genuine spiritual and intellectual quest for herself, if she is open and vulnerable and genuinely shares her pursuit with her student so that their quests are aligned, if they are trying to figure it out together, then we can start to envision Schwab's "organic and unfolding whole," a triangular relationship suffused with Eros but devoid of manipulation and abuse.

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Jim Garrison, a philosopher of education at Virginia Tech, claims that "we become what we love."²⁴ This is a bold claim, too bold. Perhaps there are other ways of becoming a certain kind of person; perhaps fear or anxiety can play a role as well. But Garrison's claim surely contains an element of truth. We are

²³ Structurally, a commitment to a universal law that binds both teacher and student fulfills this mandate, and manifests Palmer's "third thing" that holds both accountable. Thus, Brown writes, "In Orthodox Judaism, the teacher of religion and his or her student are both bound up in the same language of commandment and transgression, obligation and covenant." Indeed, it is a good rule of thumb for teachers to hold themselves to the same standards as their students, and some might even suggest that nothing good will happen when teachers permit themselves to abrogate norms that students are expected to maintain. The problem, however, is that there are indeed situations where rules apply to novices in ways that they do not apply to masters. To borrow from Franz Rosenzweig's metaphor, sometimes the path leads to a stage of pathlessness; see Rosenzweig, *On Jewish Learning* (1923/92), p. 80.

²⁴ James Garrison, *Dewey and Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching*, 1997, p. xiii.

attracted to a certain mode of life, a certain set of moral or intellectual ideals as they are manifest or embodied in the particular lives of people whom we consider to be our teachers. It is often unclear whether we are attracted primarily to the ideals and secondarily to the person, or vice versa. It may not be possible to untangle the two. Under most circumstances, we have no interest in doing so.

As teachers, then, particularly as religious educators, we have to confront the uncomfortable truth that, in some small measure, we want our students to become us, to adopt the mode of life that we are proposing for them. We want them to do so autonomously, of course, and we want to avoid mimicry and empty religious performances, but still, when we teach, we are teaching ourselves. And if we want them to become us, we may inevitably also be involved in the business of getting our students to love us, with all the danger that that implies.

In the big picture, my socks do not matter. Without doing the hard work of cultivating relationships with the students, no sartorial selection will make a difference. Likewise, unless I find other ways to bring my real quest into the classroom, the splash of color on my ankles will amount to nothing more than a curiosity. But in a small way, I hope that my socks—along with other gestures and pedagogic practices—contribute to an emotional atmosphere in the classroom marked by playfulness, by openness and vulnerability, by a sense that we're all trying to figure it out together.

Moreover, it is worth noting that I did not always care so much about my socks. I began to do so, in fact, in homage to a religious leader I knew, who was known himself for his colorful socks. This person was never formally my teacher. In fact, we did not even spend that much time together. Did I love him? No, certainly not. But I did admire him. I admired what I observed about his interactions with students, and more generally, I admired his particular way of being in the world, which involved taking his theological commitments so seriously that he was willing to sacrifice on their behalf, while also displaying a bonhomie and cheerfulness and lack of pretentiousness, exemplified by his silly socks. In this sense, I wanted to become what I loved. When I wear my colorful socks, in some small way, I have.