

Listen

JULY 2017 VOLUME 11 ISSUE 3

INVITING THE STRANGER

“And a stranger shalt thou not wrong, neither shalt thou oppress him; for ye were strangers in a foreign land.”

These words from Exodus 22:21, at once so uniquely Jewish in their context and yet universally resonant, seem more relevant than ever, throughout our planet, across countless conflicts and tensions in multiple geographies. Do not wrong strangers, they say, for you yourself were, are, and may yet be a stranger to many. Treat others as you would have them treat you. And be mindful of the possibility of becoming a stranger to yourself or to God, in another perspective.

So many different layers of estrangement!

These days, it is easy for many of us to feel besieged, and to fall back on the instinct to build barriers and walls, out of a desire for protection and safety, instead of bridges to community and understanding. We can feel prompted to act based on our fears, rather than invited to look beyond them.

Spiritual Directors have a special role to play, and a unique responsibility to help address these challenging emotions to discover how to best respond with greater empathy and peace.

What is that Spiritual Directors do anyway? Is it not to help people connect or reconnect with their own inner nature, possibilities, talents and communion with God/Brahman/Tao/The Universe, or however we might refer to a Higher Power? Does not the sum total of spiritual direction work revolve around helping “strangers” become intimate with this Higher Power, and in greater touch with themselves, and the world they live in?

Spiritual Directors are guides, helpers, companions, friends and fellow travelers. They help people connect on many different levels, the very antidote to alienation. And Spiritual Directors are themselves all initially strangers to their spiritual directees.

The whole process on so many different levels, and from so many different perspectives, is about being strangers, and working with strangers.

Recently, we held an Inviting the Stranger event in Seattle, with the hope that it will resonate and that we may have other similar events throughout the SDI network.

We began with presentations from seven of us with different spiritual backgrounds and perspectives.

Yogacharya Ellen O'Brian, the Spiritual Director of the Center for Spiritual Enlightenment (CSE) in San Jose, CA, a Kriya Yoga meditation center, spoke of the difficulties of being a spiritual leader in a Hindu tradition, where most of the leading roles continued to be reserved for men. She called attention to the need for us to look at how women are still treated within our spiritual traditions, and to rectify the biases within them.



Invite the Stranger

EVENT PHOTOS



INVITING THE STRANGER continued

Rabbi Ted Falcon, a well-known author, meditator, and public speaker of Interfaith Amigos renown, noted that the Torah enjoins its readers to treat strangers well on at least thirty-six different occasions, even beyond the references to the call to love God. He exhorted us to deal with the stranger within us as the best medicine to enable us to deal with challenging, or even dangerous, external strangers.

Miriam Frey, a Spiritual Director formation leader with a Mennonite background, spoke of growing up in a very insular environment where outsiders were feared and shunned, and her difficulties of reconciling that posture with the Biblical enjoinder to “Love Thy Neighbor.” And she then addressed her journey of spiritual growth towards wanting to be, and becoming, the very “Other” that she was taught to revile.

Genjo Marinello, a Zen Buddhist priest and Abbot of a Rinzaï Zen community in Seattle, Chobo-Ji, spoke of the relative ease of breaking out of our initial box, but of the much greater difficulty of burning off the karmic baggage separating ourselves from others, which he described as a lifelong journey for most of us. And this, he noted, is true even though the “Other” is in essence no different from ourselves.

The Rev. Maria Barrera, an interfaith minister, spiritual director, and prison chaplain, with an indigenous background, recounted her difficulties in overcoming the many prejudices, biases and obstacles that were thrown her way, and persevering through all of them. The key to her success, she noted, was inviting others to walk in her shoes, and being willing to walk in theirs, no matter how deep the gulf might appear.

Imam Jamal Rahman, a Sufi minister and one of the Interfaith Amigos, spoke of how we have become estranged from ourselves and our true nature. We are like people knee deep in water calling out for a drink to every person that passes by, he noted. According to him, the solution to estrangement was to connect on a human level with others, through the telling of stories, which are the true atomic units of the universe.

Finally, I spoke of growing up the son of a man from India, and a woman from Spain, born in Holland, and raised in the UK, India, Belgium and the United States. Although I was made to feel a stranger everywhere, something that on occasion hurt me deeply, I also learned the virtues of flexibility and adaptability, and the ability to find common ground and common humanity

quickly and effectively. There is much more that unites us all than separates us.

So how do Spiritual Directors deal with the stranger inside and outside? By recognizing the universal value of the Golden Rule, that we should treat others as we would wish to be treated ourselves. For we have all been strangers in the past, and will surely be strangers again in the future.

And yet, a stranger is but one short step away from being our closest friend and intimate. ✨

— Anil Singh-Molares



Listen

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DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE BOOK, SONG, PERSON, OR COMMUNITY THAT CONNECTS YOU WITH YOUR FAITH AND SPIRITUALITY, OR THE MYSTERY SOME NAME GOD?



Field Notes

SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS INTERNATIONAL MEMBERS RESPOND:

In response to the “What’s in a Name?” article around an expanded definition of spiritual direction, we received the following comments:

“All well said! Love it. Also a great summary of a healthy spiritual director.” — Genjo M ✨

“Spiritual direction should be seen in the light of the diverse culture and spiritually interconnected world we live in today. Rather than the perspective of being at the center and widening the circle and being inclusive, I would consider the perspective of raising the consciousness of the organization to meet the reality of the 21st century.” — Ellen O ✨

“I really liked what was written...It reflects thoughts and experiences that I have had for many years.” — Carolyn R ✨

“A Spiritual Guide is...one who is barefoot on holy ground, holding a mirror for the pilgrim learning the correct spelling of ‘GURU’ ‘Gee! You are you!’ and sharing in the discovery of that wonder!” — Martha B ✨

“Best articulation of spiritual direction I have ever written or read. I particularly like its expansiveness about how this ministry looks in other traditions.” — Lyn B ✨

“I would put at the top of the authentic spiritual directors’ key factors list (which may be alluded to with the word ‘depth’) an acknowledgement of and reliance on the most

important chair in a spiritual direction triad: the third chair occupied by the Holy Spirit (or Divine Presence or Higher Power or God or whatever other name defines that power).

I think it is important that a spiritual director is not too generically nor broadly defined. A spiritual director is NOT a counselor, nor a teacher imparting knowledge. The most important aspect of a spiritual director is a compassionate and open conduit for the movement and voice of the occupant of that third chair.” — Ellen G ✨

“I have some ideas and words that may help: Life-story listener, facilitator, and fellow traveler tending the life journey with a sojourner.” — Dawn C ✨

“ ‘The greatest gift we can give another is to listen their soul into its own discovery’ (Douglas Steere). No better definition than this and one who is a deep listener will be able to companion this mutual discovery.” — Martha B ✨

“Spiritual direction is a yearning for what gives a soul, purpose and life. It is a gift of a story shared by two people on a journey. The one who accompanies the individual on the journey is but a messenger guiding the footsteps to the One they seek.” — Michele B ✨

MEMBERS RESPOND continued

“Tending the Holy; a long loving look at the real, together. Listening to the Holy Spirit, within the directee and director. In this accompaniment, discernments by the directee can more peacefully be made.” — Miriam F ✨

“Spiritual Direction is about becoming intimate with the Divine Indwelling Presence, and then radiating Divine lovingkindness to all others.” — Tanda A ✨

“Spiritual Direction is journeying with another and helping them notice how God is working in their lives, past, present and future. A spiritual director is a detector and transmitter of how God is present and active in another’s life.” — Anne S ✨

“A spiritual director is a person with credentials to prepare and assist you with your journey to build a closer, unique, and revealing relationship with God. This journey varies in length, however it is life lasting.” — Beryl F ✨

“Spiritual direction is a gift that allows you to open your entire being to the possibilities of finding God (your Higher Power)

in and with all life’s mysterious happenings. It is allowing yourself to awaken to the true self. A spiritual director is someone who is on the journey also but is willing to companion you. A person who ‘learns to listen in stereo’ to their God, to you and to their own voice. A director ‘is.’” — Fran F ✨

“Someone who has been spiritually led by another and wants to share that wisdom with another.” — Vicky B ✨

“A listener. One who’s dedicated to and trained to listen to the One beyond all definition as well as one who listens within and listens beyond. Is still and knows...and knows no-thing. And speaks, challenges, and listens again. Learning, discovering, ... Finds it is easy to laugh, to rejoice, to grieve, to begin again. Suffers with those who suffer, rejoices with those who rejoice...all the while immersed in faith, hope, love, the reality of the Buddha nature of all.” — Sharon P ✨

Let us know your thoughts or questions about spiritual direction at listen@sdiworld.org.

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POEM

HOMeward

It happens sometimes in films—
you swallow a gust of heaven,
and know a sudden fullness
in chest and belly,

a leaning of the heart toward
its elementary place, a surprising
remembrance of the springy lift
of being, of Love.

All you've known folds then
to a vast, soft peace reclaimed
from prehistory, from a cosmic wave,
a huge, belonging laugh.

Help me to hold on for all time,
you beg of that moment.
It is dear, this bodily visitation,
this unexplained filling.

— Jean Biegun

Jean's work has been in several journals. She says that poetry is a way for the soul to talk, and spiritual direction helps the poet experience more soul.

**Know Yourself ...
... Go Deeper**

*"Who am I?"
"What is my purpose?"
"Who can I become?"*



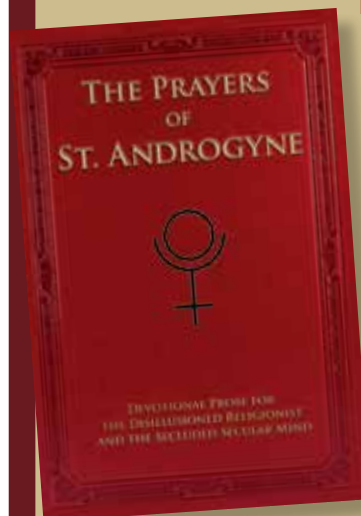
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“SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS ARE
INDIVIDUALS COMMITTED
TO HELPING OTHERS

seek and find connection

WITH A HIGHER POWER,
HOWEVER THAT POWER
MIGHT BE DEFINED. THIS
CHARACTERISTIC ALWAYS
HOLDS TRUE, REGARDLESS
OF THE PARTICULAR

*spiritual configuration
or orientation* OF THE
DIRECTORS AND SEEKERS.”



POEM

ANĀHATA

Listen with presence
like the fingers of a cellist
listen to the strings

Like the moon listens to the sun
like a bee listens to the fuchsia bell
and loses himself in the whorl

Like the mind listens to the heart
tastes the sound of bliss
and meets the Self again.

— Yogacharya Ellen Grace O'Brian

(The Moon Reminded Me, Homebound
Publications 2017).

Ellen is the Spiritual Director of the Center for Spiritual
Enlightenment (CSE) with headquarters in San Jose,
California

Anāhata is a Sanskrit term for the heart chakra, or
heart center. It means “unstuck.” As anāhata-nada it
refers to the Om vibration, the hold Word, the external
resonance of the divine presence in everyone and
everything.



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