

Listen

APRIL 2017 VOLUME 11 ISSUE 2

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

“That which we call spiritual direction by any other name would smell as sweet.”

Or would it?

Shakespeare's famous phrase, slightly adapted here, pointed adroitly to the limits of language. The “finger pointing to the moon” is not the same as the moon itself after all.

So, what of “spiritual direction?” Is it the same by any other name?

The term “spiritual director” has many associations and a long history in the Abrahamic faiths traditions, where it has been closely associated with certain strands of Judaism, with spiritual directors referred to as “*Hashpa'ah*” or “*Mashpai'h*,” depending on the strand; Christian and, much later, in particular Ignatian spirituality; and in the Islamic Sufi path, where the spiritual director is known as a “*Murshid*.” But even within these traditions there is great (and

increasing) variability in how the terms are used, defined, and contextualized. The common approach that they share is that in all of them, the spiritual director looks to engage with seekers in an open and non-judgmental way, steeped in contemplative practice and deep listening, to provide guidance and enable seekers to get closer to God.

In Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism and Vajrayana Buddhism, spiritual teachers or guides are referred to as “gurus,” or their equivalent. In Sanskrit, “Guru” means “weighty or grave,” with the connotation of “elder teacher,” or “esteemed teacher.” But the long story of that term contains overtones of someone who removes spaces and obstacles that may lie between us and our spiritual evolution. Gurus can develop highly personalized relationships with seekers, with a dynamic that is distinct to each teacher but that is deep and all pervasive.

In most strands of Buddhism, it is more

common to refer to spiritual “friends,” rather than to “directors,” “guides,” or even “teachers.” These friends encourage and allow us to evolve, such that the Buddha was reported to have said that spiritual friendship is the sum total of the spiritual life (in the Meghiya Sutta of the Pali Canon). Spiritual friends help seekers by allowing intimacy; virtuous conduct; dialogue which facilitates and encourages practice; determination, dedication, and enthusiasm for the good; and awareness of impermanence. Spiritual friends, therefore, are the most important key in the spiritual path.

Other examples include followers of Indigenous religions, who usually work with Shamans, or Taoists and Confucians, who learn how to connect with their true natures through wise and learned teachers.

Finally, a significant portion of the over 1.1 billion people worldwide that the Pew Research Center refers to as

WHAT'S IN A NAME? continued

“unaffiliated,” many of whom describe themselves as “spiritual but not religious,” seek connection with a higher power and a larger meaning in variety of ways: for example, by working with philosophy teachers as their guides, or through their work with psychologists, and other types of counselors.

Given all of this, how are we to approach the issue of who qualifies as a “spiritual director/guide/teacher/friend/counselor/advisor?”

Here are some ideas.

First, spiritual direction should be an inclusive, rather than an exclusive concept. It should always strive to welcome and invite, rather than to separate and divide, which it does on occasion, often unwittingly.

Second, at their roots, 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.

At a recent retreat I had with the SDI Coordinating Council, we identified some other key factors to look for in authentic spiritual directors, namely that they be:

- rooted in personal experience, and display “depth.”
- willing to follow universal ethical guidelines, summarized as “Do no harm.”
- accountable in a community setting.
- committed to contemplative, compassionate listening, with respect for the agency of directees.
- supervised by other spiritual directors and accountable through that direct supervision.
- committed to ongoing education and learning.

What do you think? What characteristics do you see as essential in a spiritual guide? As SDI strives to broaden its spiritual director public square, your thoughts are most encouraged and welcome.

Please send them to us at listen@sdiworld.org and we will publish a sample in our next edition. ✨

—Anil Singh-Molares



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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 following question:

“When you have experienced deeply meaningful community with other spiritual directors, what characteristics of the community made it valuable?” ✨

“Characteristics of the deeply meaningful community with other spiritual directors include the following: the authenticity of the participants, trust, honesty, vulnerability, rapport, respect, acceptance, and a non-judgmental deep listening. All of these characteristics allowed members of the group to feel free to be real, and share what has been on our minds and hearts even when we didn’t have the words yet. Often the group helped individuals articulate the niggles that obsess us and needed to be released.”

—Marjorie English, OSF ✨

Let us know your thoughts about spiritual director community at listen@sdiworld.org.

WWW.SDIWORLD.ORG

Listen is an outreach publication of Spiritual Directors International. When you visit the SDI website at www.sdiworld.org, you can learn about retreats, programs, conferences, and other educational events related to spiritual companionship. You can read descriptions of the spiritual direction relationship from a variety of

spiritual traditions, and discover excellent questions to ask yourself and any potential spiritual directors you choose to interview. To locate a spiritual director or guide, go online to *Seek and Find Guide: A Worldwide Resource of Available Spiritual Directors*. More than 6,000 spiritual directors are listed by geographical location at www.sdiworld.org. ✨



P O E M

BIRTHED

Glory be for lambs that leap
 and mincing calves that bolt and bleat
 for runnels parched then deeply sodden
 rivers bogged and swift gills streaming
 for thin leaved tendrils prodding curling
 horsehair patching thinning winging
 all birds that shriek and squawk and plunge
 into the heights and depths as one
 below the wave beyond the cloud
 for April's steely measured coming
 May's most ardent roving raving
 Hue and dab so mildly hurled
 and hearts
 that flutter
 birthed
 for earth

after Gerard Manley Hopkins

—Barbara Hudspith, Ontario, Canada

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All aggregated things
Are like a dream, a fantasy,
a bubble and a shadow,
Are like dewdrops and
a flash of lightning.
They should be regarded as such.
—and so you should
Consider in this way
all this transient world:
As a star at dawn,
a bubble floating in a stream,
A dewdrop, a flash of lightning
in a summer cloud,
the flickers of a lamp,
a phantom, and a dream.”

—excerpted from the Diamond Sutra,
trans. by Anil Singh-Molares

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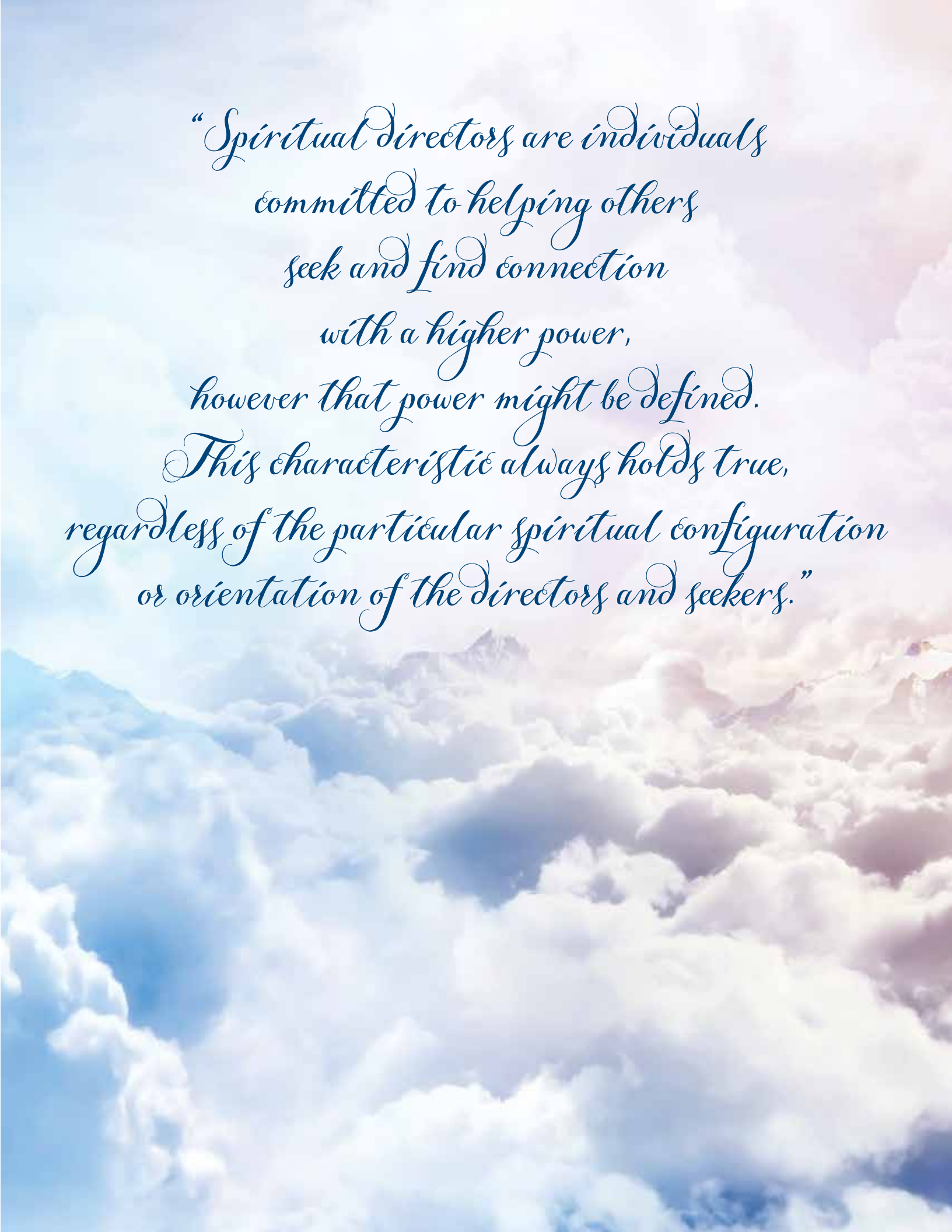
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TAKE THE NEXT STEP ON YOUR JOURNEY



*“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.”*



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