How do we discover the courage to step beyond our own comfort zone, and respond yes to someone, something, or some purpose? Do you believe it is probable that the relationships we cultivate can provide a greater understanding of our purpose and action in the world? Can you and I see the hunger and pain in the world and not be affected? How do we know—with authenticity and integrity—when a response is called forth or required from us? And, what is the valuable role of waiting, or even of resistance?

There are times in our life when we are called beyond ourselves into the embrace of something larger than we imagine possible. We can choose to respond or not. In classical spiritual language this is the time for discernment—for deep listening to our inner and outer world. We are drawn to respond, wait, or turn away.

Last week I walked along a city street, stopping at a busy intersection. The red do not cross sign flashed its warning to me. Busses, taxis, cars, and bikers crisscrossed from opposing directions. It was not time, nor safe, to step into the street. As most of us know by experience, eventually traffic pauses, some lights turn green while others become red, and we begin to walk forward. So, I waited, looking around. Other people stopped near me. From this stance, fresh ideas about discernment emerged. I offer them for reflection:

- Can I honor the value of stopping and waiting during transition or threshold times in my life?
- Do I continue to cross a particular intersection or street with the crowd—or in a familiar pattern—when the light is green?
- Could it be possible I need to turn away, and head in a different direction?
- Am I willing to stand still, take time to look in all directions, and then take a next courageous, deliberate step?

In healthy discernment, we stop, listen, look around, open to possibility, assess, wait, and then step or leap into action with deliberate intent. At times we are propelled forward by circumstances beyond our control, and have no choice but to respond. But most of the time, we really do have choices. Who is it that listens and companions you during these times? Whom do you trust? Is there a leap it may be time for you to take … or turn away from? What is your next step, perhaps something the world, a neighbor, co-worker, or even a stranger needs from you?

—Pegge Bernecker

African Grey Parrot—Psittacus erithacus

Listen is an outreach publication of Spiritual Directors International. When you visit the Spiritual Directors International Web site at www.sdiworld.org, you can learn about retreats, programs, conferences, and other 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 on-line to Seek and Find: A Worldwide Resource Guide of Available Spiritual Directors. More than 6,000 available spiritual directors are listed by geographical location at www.sdiworld.org.
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During spiritual direction sessions, we weave memory, story, experiences and incidences, feelings, relationships with others and with God, and prayer and listening into our conversation. The intention is to get in touch with, unpack, clarify, probe, or simply savor elements from your daily life experience, especially as they are known to you and understood through the lens of the sacred and your relationship with God. Often, there will be a dynamic between your past experiences, your current experiences, and how you are being called into the future. Some specific ways to focus a spiritual direction conversation include:

- **Share about a specific God experience that you have had:** How did it impact you? When did it happen? What feelings and insights did you experience? How does it stick with you still?

- **Give an overview of your prayer life as you have grown up:** What elements have been constant? What have you outgrown? Who taught you to pray? How do you pray on your own? How is prayer going now?

- **Share developments of your relationship with God throughout your life:** How do you talk to God? What sorts of things do you share with God? Who does the most talking? Who does the most listening? How does God respond to you? How do you respond to God?

- **Reflect upon God images:** How have your God images changed since you were a child? What are some of the traits that you recognize in God? Where do you feel God’s presence?

- **Explore areas of your life that require discernment and decision-making:** What are the dynamics of the situation? How do you feel? What do you consistently feel and sense as urgings, nudges, and invitations? How do God or others speak to or reveal things about the situation to you?

You will not be able to cover all of these questions in one session; in fact, one question might take a number of sessions to unpack.

—Christine Munger, MA, is a spiritual director committed to intercultural awareness and practices of inclusion. She works with Companions on a Journey at the College of Saint Benedict in Minnesota, USA. Her e-mail is CMunger@csbsju.edu.
**Humanity, enthusiasm, imagination, creativity, passion – these are some of the graces explored in the book/DVD to restore a human heart to all forms of spiritual ministry to adults.**

(from the Introduction)

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‘**BEGIN WITH THE HEART: Recovering a Sacramental Vision**’ can be ordered from your local Christian Bookshop or from The Columba Press, Dublin

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Described as a six-week daily life retreat, *Open the Door* is a masterful blend of reflection, poetry and prayer, inspiration, scripture, and artful guidance for the human spirit. In the introduction, Joyce Rupp, OSM writes:

Cathedrals. Castles. Temples. However we describe our inner terrain, one thing is certain: we tend to live in just a few rooms of our inner landscape. The full person God created us to be contains more than we can imagine, but most of us dwell within only a small portion of the superb castle of ourselves. Opening the door of our heart allows us entrance to the vast treasure of who we are and to the divine presence within us. We have an immeasurable amount of love and tenderness in us if only we open the door to discover it.

Utilizing the imagery of thresholds, doors, and even hinges and doorknobs, Rupp leads the retreatant through a six-week process that is very feasible within the context of most demanding lives with multiple commitments. I took a little more than seven weeks to complete the retreat, primarily because some days my reflections were so rich I paused for a day or two to stay with the door or threshold that was opening—or closing—within me. The daily reflections incorporate dozens of quotes from diverse writers, poets, and thinkers from the East and West. Rupp adds insightful wisdom that clearly comes from a depth of prayer and life experience. Each day the retreatant is given a reflection, a pointed question, brief meditation, original prayer, and scripture to carry throughout the day.

The six weekly themes are broad: “The Door of Our Heart,” “Knocking on the Door,” “Opening the Door,” “Standing on the Threshold,” “Closing the Door,” and “Beyond the Door.” The appendix includes rituals for groups to integrate and celebrate each week’s reflections.

I am certain that *Open the Door* is a valuable guide for men and women of all ages. Whether you have a deep spiritual life with decades of practice, or you are taking the first tentative steps to deeper meaning and authenticity, Rupp is a trusted, wise, insightful guide who leads all of us through doorways to deeper love, service, and peacemaking.

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it is our stories
that are the stones
of God’s language
on the rocky, jagged, radiant
path of life.
It is the holy listener
who helps arrange these stones
into cairns
which point the way to
God’s desire for our lives
and
God’s desire for our every moment.
The cairns, if patiently balanced,
uneven though they be,
if patiently balanced,
by the two who gather in God’s presence,
if patiently balanced,
can point the way to heaven.
Heaven, after all,
is making God-serving meaning
of our stories
on this rocky, jagged, radiant
path of life.

– Jennifer (Jinks) Hoffmann
Question: I like to pray with song and dance, and often feel especially close to God during these times. But I was told this isn’t prayer, and that I can’t trust my body—that the sensations and feelings in my body are primarily sinful and would actually lead me away from God. Is this true?

Hoot Hoot: In some spiritual traditions this is a valid belief and contemporary theological stance. In other spiritual traditions, mistrust of the body and emotion is considered a distortion and lie. When discerned with care, your body and accompanying emotions can guide you toward wholeness and holiness.

Talk to a spiritual director and explore your own assumptions and beliefs about your body. Our bodies are an incarnate experience of breath, life, and spirit. Additionally, learning about the many varied ways people pray would be helpful to you. Music and dance can be a beautiful prayer path to a relationship with the Divine and all of creation. A healthy spiritual practice and a wise spiritual guide can help you listen to your body wisdom, and affirm this truth for yourself.

—If you have a question for Owl, please e-mail Listen@sdeworld.org.

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