To live a meaningful life of compassion and service, we need good guides! If we want to grow into our potential as vital, authentic human beings we need one another. Our ancestors, elders, friends, and the world itself teach us how to live. John O’Donohue said, “A friend is a loved one who awakens your life in order to free the wild possibilities within you.” It is essential that we encounter people and creatures who awaken our wild possibilities. A good spiritual guide is able to look into our essence and convey I see you. This frees us to integrate our own life story.

There is magnificence in our ordinary, everyday life. And, it is easy to miss beauty and significance when we are busy and inattentive. Wise companions—and beloved friends—can guide us in the process of becoming fully human, embodied, and capable of transformative, mutual love. Occasionally we may have an experience that knocks us off our feet or awakens a wild possibility. At times like these, when the interwoven nature of the cosmos and our connectedness intersect, a flash of insight can lead us to gratefulness.

I live on a steep, tree-studded hillside overlooking a lake. Snow-frosted glaciers dominate the eastern horizon. Some days, during my Qigong practice, my fingers, hands and arms trace the jagged dips and peaks, back and forth. One morning, nestled into a mission oak rocker, I gazed at mist interweaving thousands of spruce trees. Daybreak shimmered into shadowed mountain peaks. Five minutes passed, then ten. I pondered a question in my heart—a creative, wild awakening. A sheer white flash caught my periphery vision. I rose, in utter stillness, taking one step forward. My breath hushed. Two trumpeter swans flew, side by side, wing tips inches from each other, in fluid motion. Within thirty seconds, they vanished. Their soaring, powerful presence was gone. I have not seen them since, and yet, my inner spirit remains awake to their untamed, precious gift. I am grateful.

In essence, this too is the gift of a spiritual companion. A spiritual director is rooted in both visible and invisible realities. Spiritual guides witness our beauty, fragility, and potential to become wildly alive. A spiritual companion reflects our truth and place in the community of life. The possibility for hope, healing, and love in our world is real. Spiritual friends remind us—you belong, you matter. For this, let us be grateful.

Who are your significant spiritual guides and ancestors?

How do you listen to your potential, life patterns, and inner dreaming? Who listens with you?

What wild possibilities dwell within you?

How might your presence free an unexpected possibility for someone else?

—Pegge Bernecker

Trumpeter Swan—Cygnus buccinator

SEEDS OF INTEREST:
- Field Guide: Heart-Centered Prayer
- Poetry
- Global Resources
- Book Review: The Hidden Power of the Gospels
- Ask Owl
invite you into a very simple **Heart-Centered Practice** which only takes about five minutes and can be done anywhere. It can completely shift your grounding and awareness so you respond to the world from a more heart-centered place:

**Begin by becoming aware of your body.** Notice how your body is feeling, simply being present to sensations you are experiencing, welcoming in both the body’s delight and discomfort.

**Connect to your breath, deepening it gently.** As you **inhale**, imagine God breathing life into you. As you **exhale**, allow yourself to experience a moment of release and surrender into this time and place, becoming fully present. Take a couple cycles of breath to simply notice this life-sustaining rhythm which continues moment by moment even when you are unaware of it.

In your imagination, gently allow your breath to **carry your awareness from your head** (which is your thinking, analyzing, judging center) **down to your heart center** (where you experience life from a place of greater integration, feeling, and intuition.) Consider placing your hand on your heart to experience a physical connection with your heart center and draw your awareness to this place.

Breathe into your heart center and **begin to notice what you are feeling right now** in this moment without judging or trying to change it. Take a few moments to simply be present to whatever it is you are feeling and making some room within yourself to experience this without pushing it away.

Call to mind the spark of God which the ancient monks and mystics tell us dwells in your heart. Bring the **compassion of God** to however you are feeling right now, not trying to change anything, but just gently holding yourself in this space.

As you experience yourself filling with **compassion** for your own experience, imagine breathing that compassion out into the world and **connecting to other hearts**—both human and animal—beating across the world in a rhythm of love.

**Gently allow your breath to bring your awareness back to the room** and take a moment to name what you noticed in this experience.

This practice is especially powerful when we find ourselves feeling tenderhearted, anxious, sad, or any emotion which feels uncomfortable or confusing. The idea is not to resolve the emotion or figure it out, but to simply allow it to have a moment of space within us. Try pausing once or twice a day for this practice and see what you discover.

—Christine Valters Paintner, PhD, is a writer, artist, spiritual director, retreat facilitator, and teacher. Her fields of expertise include Christian spiritual practices, monastic spirituality, and the expressive arts. Her new book with co-author Betsey Beckman is *Awakening the Creative Spirit: Bringing the Arts to Spiritual Direction* (2010). She lives in Seattle, Washington, USA, and can be e-mailed at Christine@AbbeyoftheArts.com.
Gratefulness

For the shy pink sky peeking
above the horizon at dawn's dawning;
for the kaleidoscope of sky’s palette, vermilions,
lavenders, and burgundies, at even-song;
for diamond sparkles on ocean surface,
for dolphin’s frisking, figure-eights
before our astonished eyes;
for the good earth that rebirths
solid birches each year,
for the loamy soil that brings forth
potatoes and carrots to nourish us;
for bodies that function well enough
even as we age;
for minds that create newness;
for eyes that see a rainbow’s promise,
and the longing in a timid soul;
for ears that hear a cardinal’s song
and the soft weeping of a widow;
for hands that touch a newborn’s skin
and the bread of life as we knead it;
for the nose that smells lilacs and apple-pies;
for hearts that beat and give us life,
and turn to others, in lovingkindness;
for friends with whom we share our secrets
and our silliness with belly-laughs;
for family, the love and comfort
we wear like a prayer-shawl,
in good times and in bad;
for our dreams in the day
that light the way to our potential,
for our dreams in the night
that guide us there;
for the gift of sitting quietly and listening in,
for the privilege of sitting reverently with another;
for all the moments in each day
as life moves beyond and in our reach,
for all this, Source of Life
we bow our heads in gratefulness.

– Jennifer (Jinks) Hoffmann, February 21, 2010
Through scientific study and decades of clinical work, Drs. Bickford & Covington have developed a "formula" to help each of us experience growth while living Consciousness. This formula® has been taught nationally within organizations for a decade. Now seekers of spiritual/psychological transformation are invited to experience this triptych experience. The "formula" transforms the way one experiences each hour of the day. Understanding people, including yourself, is the first step in experiencing why relationships in your life are the way they are (MBTI)... Comprehending levels of Consciousness is the primary step in resolving disappointment, anger, resentment and loss in your life (Hawkins).... Developing, growing and cultivating a "Virtuoso Effect" changes everything you want to change... and strengthens the best parts of you.

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Practical, theological, poetic, and transformative, The Hidden Power of the Gospels: Four Questions, Four Paths, One Journey offers powerful spiritual guidance for every seeker. Inviting the reader to take a “reawakened journey” into the Christian gospels, spiritual director Alexander J. Shaia says, “If you choose to come along, you will discover that the four traditional gospels provide a complete spiritual and psychological map that stretches across time, place, and culture. This view, though it may seem revolutionary, is actually a restoration of the full process of spiritual transformation laid out by early Christians, now validated through current understandings of psychology, anthropology, sociology, and science. Since the journey is sequential, encompasses all four gospels, and cannot be shortened, I have named it quadratos” (xi).

Skillfully illuminating the prayer and spiritual practice inherent in each of the four gospels, Shaia explains that each gospel addresses a necessary spiritual dilemma found in every transformative journey. He writes, “Matthew is the gospel of beginning, and addresses the question, “How do we face change?” As we cross into the second stage, a time of deep difficulty, Mark answers the question, “How do we move through suffering?” Understanding does arrive, yet we may not be ready, so John speaks to the question, “How do we receive joy?” Finally, completing the transformational process, Luke responds to the challenges of “How do we mature in service?” (xii).

Integrating his extensive learning, reflection, and spiritual practice, Shaia provides a blueprint for seekers. He reminds the reader that the spiritual journey is cyclical, not linear. It is a journey of transformation that must include a daily spiritual practice, and regular meeting times with a spiritual guide or mentor. The chapters include narrative, commentary, a concise summary, and recommendations for study and practice. A companion Web site offers additional resources and free downloads of reflective questions to use with small groups. Chapter titled “The Eight Essential and Continuing Practices for the Fourth Path,” contains guidance for a lifetime of spiritual practice.

Shaia’s vision is worthy of valuable engagement. He promises, “We said that if you followed this journey in a serious and committed manner, your life would change. It would become better—incredibly better—although we did not promise an overnight metamorphosis. It would take some time, and some spiritual elbow grease as well. But eventually, equanimity would replace anxiety, compassion would supplant resentment—and instead of loneliness, curiosity, community, and joy would be the blessings of your life” (339). Indeed, you will discover that The Hidden Power of the Gospels offers an essential contribution to the art of being human.

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In unfamiliar streets I wander laden with a load so full that surely there will be enough for all. In the same streets we meet. I see your clothes, your eyes, and think “Aha! Here is one who needs me.” With a smile I hope is warm I offer you bread only to find that the piece you give me is exactly what I did not know I needed.

– Jennifer Gordon, SCL, Colorado Vincentian Volunteer
Question: I'm active in my church and in a small faith sharing group. Over the past six months I've noticed an inner tug to grow deeper with God, but I'm not sure how. Could spiritual direction help my prayer life and be a way for me to deepen my relationship with God?

Hoot Hoot: Yes! Spiritual direction can definitely help you engage your prayer life and relationship with God in new ways. Meeting regularly with a spiritual director will likely lead to deepening your experience of being alive. Spiritual direction enhances your ongoing desire to grow in your relationship with the Sacred. Spiritual direction is not meant to be a replacement for your participation in a faith sharing group or spiritual community.

When you meet with a spiritual director—usually once a month for about an hour—you can explore and talk about every dimension of your life story. You choose what topics to bring to spiritual direction. Conversation and sharing can encompass prayer practices, your hopes, dreams, struggles, grief, loneliness, vocation, relationship with God or the Sacred as it is now, as it has been throughout your life timeline, and how you long for it to become in the future. Henri Nouwen wrote, “There are as many ways to pray as there are moments in life. Sometimes we seek out a quiet spot and want to be alone, sometimes we look for a friend and want to be together. Sometimes we like a book, sometimes we prefer music. Sometimes we want to sing out with hundreds, sometimes only whisper with a few. Sometimes we want to say it with words, sometimes in deep silence. In all these moments, we gradually make our lives more of a prayer and we open our hands to be led by God even to places we would rather not go.”

Spiritual direction helps us listen, pray, and engage all the moments of life. Thank you for your question and desire to engage your spiritual life in a new way!

—if you have a question for Owl, please e-mail Listen@sdiworld.org.
“Tending the holy around the world and across traditions ...
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—Translated by Marta Rios and Xavier Ortiz Monasterio

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