I sit facing my computer screen, inches from a large window. My heart thunks. Outside a shadow moves. A moose peers at me. Vividly tall, she is furry, sturdy, six feet away, eyes glued in stillness. Her nose twitches. I catch my breath, meet her gaze. Seconds pass. Does she comprehend glass? Does it matter? When her shoulder muscles flick, she turns away, hooves crunching tracks through the snow crust. I remain, untangled. My breath is slow and deep.

How can we cultivate compassion when the world we inhabit may be hostile, stressful, aggressive, and painful? It is simple, but not easy, and requires our ongoing commitment. Compassion is not reliant upon ease of circumstance. Some of the most trustworthy, compassionate people I know have suffered profoundly. Paula D’Arcy writes, “How you approach something determines what you will see.” Roshi Joan Halifax tells us, “The world is so tangled, and I need to be somewhat untangled to meet it.” These are good insights. We cannot give what we do not have. What we cultivate is shared with others.

To cultivate compassion we must first show up and be available to place, time, and our embodied self. This prepares us to meet someone or something with integrity and presence. We each live a sacred story with particularities and peculiarities unique to our personality, life experiences, and our decisions of yes, no, and maybe.

Three moose wander in my yard—it is their natural habitat. The two twins were birthed when sun shone for twenty hours a day. Lush green ferns and foliage sheltered their tentative beginnings. Months later, I now sit in silence. Two feet of snow arrived, and neighbors help one another in time of need. I do not live in a wildlife preserve or zoo. Bear tracks across my driveway startle me from complacency. While outdoors, I am calmly alert, with a choice to engage the realness of time and place. I am interwoven in this landscape, a part of it. How will I forge connection and compassion in this climate?

Do you understand my question? Perhaps it needs translation: Where do you live—what is your natural habitat? Who do you encounter with your everyday activity? What causes you to stop in awe and wonder? Where do you rub up against fear and disconnect? These are essential questions in the marketplace or monastery, the inner city, suburbia, or wilderness. Thomas Merton said, “The deepest level of communication is not communication but communion. It is wordless.”

What can your natural habitat teach you? A spiritual director can accompany you when you share your stories of desire, surprise, fear, hope, and despair. Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp reminds us, “The teaching of compassion, the exercise of the soul, will open the heart. And then nothing will be impossible.” How will you cultivate compassion through the concrete specifics of your life?

—Pegge Bernecker

SEEDS OF INTEREST:
- Field Guide: Learning Bird Language—A Pathway to a Contemplative Life
- Field Notes: Be Still
- Poetry: How to Meditate
- Global Resources
- Book Review: Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God’s Transforming Presence
- Ask Owl
Learning Bird Language—
A Pathway to a Contemplative Life

“Contemplative living is living in true relationship with oneself; God, others and nature, free of the illusions of separateness.”

– Thomas Merton

It is easy to think of contemplation as something people do in a monastery or learn in their later years. But for indigenous people throughout the world, and especially for the ancient scout, a contemplative heart was acquired as part of learning survival. Those of us who seek to live a contemplative life can learn a great deal from indigenous cultures whose very way of being in the world cultivates contemplation and interiority.

It was the job of the ancient scouts to travel many miles ahead of the people so that they could discern danger and find suitable living situations for the group. The survival of all depended on the scouts’ alertness and attentiveness to their environment. Because the ancient scouts were so attuned to the earth and its creatures they could read the language of the birds just as we learn to read road signs. It was the language of the birds that could, and still can, be discerned by the five universal messages they all convey. Most significantly, the scout could decipher the bird’s alarm call as distinct from their other four calls. This understanding guided and protected the scout.

From the youngest ages, the elders trained their children to listen. They learned to listen to the birds, the wind, and most of all to the silence. They were trained to be at home in the silence as it is a doorway to the Great Silence or to the Spirit-that-moves-through-all-things. Even when they played with other children, there was a great deal of shared silence and attentiveness to the environment that surrounded them. This stands in sharp contrast to the frequency with which modern youth fill up natural spaces with boom boxes that exude loud hyper music.

Jon Young is a contemporary expert on nature awareness and the language of the birds. His expertise comes from elders of indigenous tribes as well as from the birds themselves. He would say there is nothing spiritual or religious about the information he teaches as it simply reflects a way of life. I would suggest that the entire life of the indigenous people was a contemplative one. In order to understand his teachings and to understand the significance of bird language, it is necessary to understand what Young and others call Jungle Law. This law pertains to nature in general and the rules are the same whether one is in Africa, Asia, or North, Central, or South America. We are all interconnected, not only at the level of matter, but also at the level of perception and communication.

...For the full story, go online to http://bit.ly/ListenFieldGuide

—Nancy Cannon is an artist and a spiritual director who lives with her husband on eight wooded acres in Michigan, USA. Their land provides daily creature encounters as well as endless inspiration for her art. She can be reached at nancycannon@allearthtiles.com
Prayer and contemplative practice shift throughout our lifetime. What once was life-giving can become a desert or wasteland when we grow and life circumstances change. At other times, a former spiritual practice can be remembered and renewed. I recently welcomed my old friend, Psalm 46:10a, and embrace its familiar simplicity. In particular, I appreciate how simple it is to pray this way, wherever I find myself. If I am experiencing stress, I am immediately calmed, and available to be present to myself and current situation. When I feel thankful, this easy, contemplative practice deepens my gratefulness and compassion.

Please join me, wherever you are. Find a dignified, comfortable position, and slowly repeat each phrase. Pause between each line for however long you desire. Simply rest and be. When thoughts flit in your mind or sensations move in your body, do not be concerned. Simply notice, and let go. When your time is complete—it could be seconds, minutes, or hours—take a deep breath, then offer a silent thank you for your being, your breath, your life.

**Psalm 46:10a**

*Be still, and know that I am God.*

*... Be still and know that I am.*

*... Be still and know.*

*... Be still.*

*... Be*
How to Meditate

Thinking of lizards
The dusty ones, the color of earth
Aware of emptiness
They see with bulging eyes
And move quickly into stillness

— Rev. Laura West, Ukiah, California, USA

“A Sabbatical Journey in the Southwest”

Spring: March 11 - April 25, 2011
Fall: September 16 - October 31, 2011
Spring: March 16 - April 30, 2012
Fall: September 14 - October 29, 2012

A 6-week holistic program, for men and women religious and priests, that offers the time, the space, and the guidance to step back from one’s ordinary chronos activities into the kairos moment of the Sabbath, in a peaceful oasis set in the desert of the Southwest. Spiritual direction, daily Eucharist, input sessions and small group sharing, an 8-day retreat, outings, and other activities are part of the program.

For more information or to register, please contact:

Canossian Spirituality Center,
5625 Isleta Blvd. SW,
Albuquerque, NM 87105
Phone: (505) 452-9402 / Fax: (505) 877-2571
Email: spiritualityctr@yahoo.com
www.canossianspiritualitycenter.org

Seek and Find: A Worldwide Resource Guide of Available Spiritual Directors
IS NOW LIVE! WWW.SDIWORLD.ORG
Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God’s Transforming Presence offers sound teaching, vulnerable life stories, and wise guidance for individuals and groups who seek God through the disciplines of silence and solitude. Writing from her evangelical Christian roots, Ruth Haley Barton offers insight into the profound path of contemplative prayer and intimacy with God.

Her journey into the deliberate practice of silence and solitude begins when her new spiritual director says, “Ruth, you are like a jar of river water all shaken up. What you need is to sit still long enough that the sediment can settle and the water can become clear” (29). Barton says, “I couldn’t even imagine what it would be like to be still long enough for anything to settle! I couldn’t imagine not having an agenda or a prayer list or a study plan” (29). However, out of desperation and an inner emptiness, she said “yes” to sit still.

Barton’s accessible language and compelling invitation will refresh seasoned spiritual practitioners, spiritual directors, and everyone beginning a spiritual practice. Topics address the significance of rest, areas of resistance and desire, the experience of emptiness, facing self, resting in pure presence, the value of having someone accompany us, and that most important truth, “If my experiences in solitude and silence don’t make a difference in this real-life moment, then I’m not sure any of this is worth much” (130).

Barton writes, “In the midst of the high-performance cultures in which I lived and worked and worshiped, it was embarrassing to acknowledge such a voracious desire for silence and solitude. I was afraid people would question my ability to produce along the lines they were measuring. I was afraid of becoming irrelevant in a world that measures relevance by output and being out front” (127).

A spiritual director and retreat leader, Barton sheds light on the power of the contemplative path. Through her guidance, we encounter the depth of silence, and the ways we sabotage and struggle along the way. With “A Guide for Groups” included, Invitation to Solitude and Silence is a valuable resource, particularity for Christians who want to grow deeper with scripture and intimacy with God.

**Spiritual Direction with Veterans**

Are you a returning veteran from Iraq or Afghanistan?

Are you seeking a spiritual practice?

Then perhaps you would be interested in Spiritual Direction. Spiritual Direction is a series of one-on-one conversations which provide opportunities for a person to share their spiritual life within a safe, nonjudgmental and confidential environment. For information and appointments, please call: Margaret Holden at 212-544-2303 or e-mail mholdenfsp@aol.com
**2011 Directed Retreats**

**Guided Retreat:** June 26 - July 1, 2011

**Ignatian Spirituality & the Directed Retreat**
Practicum for Experienced Spiritual Directors
June 6 - August 1, 2011

**Spiritual Exercises Institute for Retreatants**
30-day retreat
of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius
June 24 - July 1, 2011

**Supervision for Spiritual Directors**
One-on-one ongoing supervision for those in the Ministry of Spiritual Direction

For details & applications, call Karen Doyle, SSJ at 516. 621. 8300 x 25, or kdoyle@inisfada.net

**ART PRAYER IN TUSCANY**

Contemplative Retreat & day trips
Assisi, Cortona, Medieval Towns
June 20-30, 2011
Monastic Setting
Contact: srplane@juno.com or
Cenacle Sisters – 561-249-1621

**THE PECOS BENEDICTINE MONASTERY**

**Presents**

**THE 2011-12 PECOS BENEDICTINE**
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June 19-July 17, 2011 with Follow-up in August 5-19, 2012

A unique experience of:
- learning the Art of Spiritual Direction,
- being directed to facilitate direction;
- incorporating community and solitude, silence,
- listening and communication;

within the Benedictine monastic setting, while
residing in our guesthouse;

in our peaceful rural environment, with the Pecos River "running through it".

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For further details: Call 505-757-6600 ext. 265,
or email school@pecosmonastery.org,
or write Pecos Benedictine Monastery,
P. O. Box 1080, Pecos, NM 87552

Stillpoint Center for Spiritual Development seeks an enthusiastic Executive Director who is passionate about spiritual development to work with the Board of Directors and Founding Director by taking a primary role in the overall leadership of the organization with a primary focus on fundraising and development. Previous leadership and fundraising experience preferred. Please visit www.stillpointcsd.org for more information. Send resume with cover letter to StillpointLasVegas@gmail.com with salary requirements.

**GLOBAL RESOURCES:** Supporting Your Spiritual Journey

**March 7–8, 2011 Colloquium**
Explore impact of cosmological and evolutionary thinking on life of faith
Elaine Prevallet, SL, PhD; Detroit, MI, USA
Dominican Center Religious Development
313-387-9574; www.dominicancenter.org

**July 22 – August 5, 2011**
Mission Santa Barbara, CA, USA
Monastery of the Risen Christ School for Spiritual Directors: Abbot David Geraets
Contact Dr. Marie J. DiSciullo-Naples
207-364-7288; joyologist@gwi.net

**Healing Trauma Workshop**
by Maureen Conroy, March 18 – 20, 2011
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
For spiritual directors, counselors, others
CAD$95-$200 commuters or residents
204-339-1705; www.stbens.ca

**April 28 - May 2, 2011**
Atlanta, Georgia, USA
“Cultivating Compassion”
Spiritual Directors International educational events with keynote Dr. Janet Ruffing, RSM, spiritual director Wilkie Au, MDiv, PhD, and dozens of workshops to help you cultivate compassion in your communities
www.sdiworld.org

**“How to Seek & Find a Spiritual Director”**
FREE one hour SDI teleconference:
February 8, 2011
12:00 EST; 5:00 GMT/UTC
Details and RSVP at www.sdiworld.org

**Joint more than 6,500 people in a global contemplative, multi-faith learning community called Spiritual Directors International. For more than twenty years, SDI has been committed to compassionate listening around the world and across traditions. Everyone who cares about spiritual companionship is invited to become a member of Spiritual Directors International, a charitable nonprofit serving the educational needs of people who offer spiritual companionship. www.sdiworld.org**

- Connect on Facebook: Spiritual Directors International for spiritual care.
- Order a FREE subscription to Listen: A Seeker’s Resource for Spiritual Direction. Go to: www.sdiworld.org

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Question: I’ve begun meditating on my own for fifteen minutes every day. I read a book that said it is beneficial to sit in silence, and let go of my thoughts. After two months, I’m becoming restless in the quiet. Also, I’m dreaming more at night. I’m recalling memories from my past, and reexamining some of the choices I’ve made in my life. I wonder if there is something more I should pay attention to. Is this common?

Hoot Hoot: Thank you for deciding to include contemplative practice in your everyday life. This is good! Your question is excellent. When we make time to engage inner silence and thus listen more clearly to our own promptings and the world around us, we open to the unknown and unpredictable. We also begin to realize how distracted and fragmented we can be. A sure way to discover that life is an adventure is through contemplative practice, prayer, mindfulness, or meditation. You will find your own language to describe your process.

Everyone has a unique path—and your experience is common! It sounds as if you are at a place of questioning and inner exploration where a spiritual guide would be of assistance. A contemplative practice leads us to navigate our inner terrain. You are simply and profoundly integrating parts of yourself; this can be a simultaneous experience of consternation and exhilaration. Healing, forgiveness, life purpose, and vocation all come to light.

You do not mention if you are a part of a small group, or if you have any companions who have begun this journey with you. A spiritual director or guide can be of value; so too is a friend or group that gathers with contemplative practice as the focus.

To locate a spiritual director near you, go to www.sdiworld.org. Search the free, online, Seek and Find: A Worldwide Resource Guide of Available Spiritual Directors, and watch more than twenty-five YouTube videos in the Spiritual Directors International Learns From... educational series. Please continue to stay with your process, and be willing to risk an adventure into fullness of life.

—If you have a question for Owl, please e-mail Listen@sdiworld.org.
“Tending the holy around the world and across traditions …
Al servicio de lo sacro alrededor del mundo y a través de las tradiciones …”

—Translated by Marta Rios and Xavier Ortiz Monasterio

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610-670-3642

2011 Winter and Spring 7-Day Directed Retreats
Jan. 18–26, Feb. 23–March 3, April 5–13,

Thomas Ryan, C.S.P. will present: PRAY ALL-WAYS on March 11-13, 2011
Contemplative living keeps our antennae up and receiver station open to the messages always coming in from the Sender. Fr. Ryan will teach us how to hone this resonance through a variety of prayer forms and methods.

Timothy Gallagher, O.M.V. will present: DISCERNING THE WILL OF GOD:
An Ignatian Guide to Christian Decision Making on April 15-17, 2011
When faced with choices in life, how can we know which choice God wills? Through experiences taken from real life, Fr. Gallagher will help us to explore St. Ignatius's text on ways of discerning God's will.

Kathryn Fitzgerald, D.Min. and William Sneck, S.J., Ph.D. will present
A DAY FOR SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS:
SOUL SEARCHING: Archetypes Discovered and Befriended on May 9, 2011
As we listen to our directees as well as reflect on our own journeys, our knowledge of archetypes and how they illuminate our stories and influence our behavior can be an invaluable practical resource.

For a complete list of our retreats and workshops please visit our website: www.jesuitcenter.org.