Listen
A Seeker’s Resource for Spiritual Direction

BECOME AVAILABLE

My smartphone chimed, indicating a new text message. I read four words, “How was your day?” Pausing, the simple sentence evoked a multitude of emotions, sensations, and thoughts. I stood still, surprised. Primary was the realization that it has been a very long time since I’d been the recipient of this gentle question, a genuine invitation to reflect and share, four simple words conveying interest and care.

Our conversations and communication with each other are often functional, relaying data and details: I’ll meet you at ...., When is ...?, I need ...., How about ...?, Where is ...?, and so forth. The text, How was your day? queried me, posed a reflective question, evoked my response, and began a mutual conversation and exchange that grew intimacy and friendship. When we communicate and interact with each other, a flow of energy and presence brings forth expansion or contraction.

I had a choice in my response to that text message—I could share about the productivity or pleasures of the day, or my concerns and fatigue, or a dozen other details. My desire was to be utterly available to my best self, and to the person asking the question. To become available means to be able to avail ourselves on behalf of someone, or something. It is a choice that involves intention, willpower, and decision. Sometimes to be available involves risk and takes courage. Being available generates connection and ultimately involves both giving and receiving.

In the beginning of Aleph, a provocative new novel by author Paulo Coelho, the main character prepares to make a journey, and visits a chapel. Coelho writes, “There I asked Our Lady to guide me with her love and help me identify the signs that will lead me back to myself. I know that I am in all the people surrounding me, and that they are in me. Together we write the Book of Life, our every encounter determined by fate and our hands joined in the belief that we can make a difference in this world. Everyone contributes a word, a sentence, an image, but in the end it all makes sense: the happiness of one becomes the joy of all” (21).

When we pause, on behalf of our own soul stirrings, on behalf of another person, or when stirred by empathy, compassion, or injustice, we evoke the inner spaciousness to become available. To be available allows healing, wholeness, connection, and joy to birth in the cosmos. I imagine a world where every day we make the time to pause and ask, How was your day? or How are you? to someone dear to us, or to a complete stranger. And then show up, and listen.

A spiritual companion might ask these kinds of questions during spiritual direction, opening a pathway of conversation, and allowing a listening presence to flow within and between both the listener and the speaker. When asked with sincerity, these genuine, evocative questions heal, and lead each of us to our authentic self, mystery, and ultimately write the book of our life.

—Pegge Erkeneff

SEEDS OF INTEREST:

Contemplative Reflection: Breathe
Book Review: Writing—The Sacred Art: Beyond the Page to Spiritual Practice
Poem: Out of the Depths
Global Resources
Poem: A Way of Seeing
Ask Owl
CONTEMPLATIVE REFLECTION

BREATHE

Pause, where ever you are.

Breathe until you feel your chest and belly expand.

Let go. Do it again.

Again

Wiggle your toes. Imagine your breath moving in your body, like a pulse beat.

Wiggle your fingertips

Be still.

Imagine your breath moving up from your fingertips...

Up your arms...

tickling your scalp and ears, then brushing down your neck, off your shoulders.

Continue to breathe. Quietly and slowly speak these words aloud, allowing your attention to focus and pause when you speak each word:

Fingertips
Eyes

Scalp
Mouth

Chin
Shoulders
Belly
Thighs
Calves
Toes
Neck
Heart
Hips
Knees
Ankles
Solos of feet

Breathe, be still for several moments or minutes.

Wiggle and shake your body vigorously. Smile.

“Contemplative Reflection”

Spring: May 17 - July 1, 2013
Fall: September 13 - October 28, 2013
Spring: May 16 - June 30, 2014
Fall: September 12 - October 27, 2014

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

Seeking spiritual direction? Go to www.sdiworld.org
BOOK REVIEW

Writing—The Sacred Art: Beyond the Page to Spiritual Practice
by Rami Shapiro and Aaron Shapiro
176 pages, CAD$14.40, GBP£10.86, USD$16.99
Review by Carol A. Fournier

Writing—The Sacred Art: Beyond the Page to Spiritual Practice by spiritual teacher Rami Shapiro and writing coach Aaron Shapiro offers a textured path to deeper self-awareness informed by writing as a spiritual practice.

If you feel called to engage the five worlds of body, heart, mind, soul, and spirit through a holistic experience of writing as a spiritual practice the authors will challenge, entice and encourage you to dance with the fluid nature of life. An invitation into the essential nature of the human experience can assist in reclaiming the integrative path that all faith traditions point towards. The Shapiro’s—father and son—encourage writers to embrace the shadow as a source of insight and spiritual inspiration. Redeeming the shadow is a sacred work that emerges through the art of writing, and transforms the writer while inviting reconciliation of hidden places through the creative process.

The authors share from the wisdom that comes from spirituality well lived, and informed by the practicality of living in the daily-ness of understanding the true or authentic Self and adaptive self, neighbors and enemies, and God. The book offers a weaving of wisdom from Judaism, Christianity, and Sufism (mystical Islam) informed by perspectives in contemporary philosophy and theology as it broadly relates to spirituality, and particularly to the human experience.

Rami Shapiro writes, “We both imagine that in engaging with the craft of writing, we are seeking some kind of encounter: with the human, with the divine, with life, with art, with the other. It doesn't really matter. What matters is that, for us, these encounters occur in words, in the opportunities afforded by ink and paper. The writing prompts in this book are just that: opportunities” (xv).

Nearly fifty writing exercises are included. An exercise in the chapter “Writing to Open the Mind” encourages personal consideration about “Who’s In? Who’s Out?”. The authors suggest that the writer consider who is in and who is out in terms of religion, family, and self, then honestly challenge the established norms of the journey. For example, they write, “Starting with the “Religion” section, think in terms of who’s in: who are the chosen, the saved, the believers, and the righteous and so on... and “Who’s Out”...Who are the unchosen? Who are the unsaved?” Once a list is compiled the authors propose further writing about the rationale for the choices that have been made, encouraging consideration of the reality that “who goes where and why depends on a story you accept as true” (68-69).

As a trainer of interfaith spiritual directors and counselors, Writing—The Sacred Art: Beyond the Page to Spiritual Practice is a means of encouraging and challenging self-awareness. The thoughtfully constructed resources and exercises could contribute to the engagement of spirituality within psychotherapy as a form of bibliotherapy as well as a fine addition in the formation of ministers, chaplains, spiritual guides, and theologians.

—Carol A. Fournier, MS, MA, NCC, is director and founder of the Silver Dove Institute in Burlington, Vermont, USA. She trains interfaith spiritual directors and counselors internationally. A retreat director and author, she lives in Vermont, USA. Her e-mail is info@silverdoveinstitute.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 5,000 spiritual directors are listed by geographical location at www.sdiworld.org.
Out of the Depths

Out of the depths I cried to you
And you pained me by your answer
Deeper... deeper... deeper still
Deeper I went
Into the silence
Into the cavernous spaces
Into the darkness
And the lonely places
A place of no life –
A place of agonised pain –
Yet you said just trust –
Just stay, just try
Don’t seek to run away

Restless, I struggled to stay,
Pained, I ran away,
You drew me back,
I wriggled as caught in a trap

And out of those depths
The tears began to flow
Anger fear dread and shame
Rose subsided and passed away
Memories again relived, released
And self renewed

And through those darkened places
Deeper, deeper still into the silence
Until that place of emptiness
Of dread lonely death and darkness
Becomes a vast pool
My rock, my life, my every foundation
Still pool of life, ruah emerges.

– Bridget

GLOBAL RESOURCES: Supporting Your Spiritual Journey

Spiritual Guidance Training Program
A two-year, ecumenical weekend residency program, beginning in January 2013.
Contact Rita Lui, OP
Siena Retreat Center, Racine, WI
www.SienaRetreatCenter.org

Multi-Faith Spiritual Companionship
Advanced Course for Spiritual Directors
Prepares you to companion all in our multi-faith spiritual world.
February 11-15, 2013, Berkeley, CA
www.chaplaincyinstitute.org

November 13, 2012
“How to Seek and Find a Spiritual Director”
FREE one hour SDI teleconference
12:00 EDT; 4:00 GMT/UTC
Details and RSVP at www.sdiworld.org

February 22 – 25, 2013
Mission Santa Barbara, CA, USA
Monastery Risen Christ Reunion Retreat
School graduates & guests invited to “Prayer, Dreams & Healing Retreat”
207-491-7524; joyologist@gwi.net

April 11 – 14, 2013
St. Paul, Minnesota, USA
Cultivating Compassion on the River
Spiritual Directors International series of educational events including a conference with keynote Joyce Rupp, OSM, spiritual director John Pollard, and dozens of workshops, institutes, pilgrimage, and contemplative retreat to help you cultivate compassion in yourself and your communities.
Registration begins September 2012.
www.sdiworld.org

Join more than 6,000 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

SPRITITUAL DIRECTION

Spiritual direction explores a deeper relationship with the spiritual aspect of being human. Simply put, spiritual direction is helping people tell their sacred stories every day. Descriptions of a spiritual guidance relationship include Anam Cara, spiritual accompaniment, spiritual companioning, spiritual direction, spiritual guidance, spiritual mentoring, sacred friendship, and soul friendship. How would you describe a relationship with another person—or group—that listens deeply to you, and receives your sacred life story?
The Missing Link!

Rediscovering the Lost Body-Connection Within Christian Spirituality

The Missing Link for Experiencing Yourself in the Body of the Whole Christ is a Changing Relationship to Your Own Body

Edwin M. McMahon, Ph.D.
Peter A. Campbell, Ph.D.

... For Small Group Sharing and for Self or Individual Companioning

Christianity is a 2000 Year old faith rediscovering itself in the Twenty-First century via learning how to go deeper into the Body of the Whole Christ by “abiding in Love” within our own body. St. John mapped out this path for us when he wrote: “God is Love, and a person who abides in Love lives in God, and God in that person.” (1 Jn 4:14)

This workbook is designed to be used by spiritual directors, among others, in both small group settings as well as when companioning another person. It can help people to change the way they relate to difficult feelings that are too often viewed as enemies blocking our experience of “Finding God in all things.”

You will find more information at:

http://www.biospiritual.org

The above website offers a further resource for small groups and individuals seeking a more embodied experience of spirituality, better integrated with their search for human wellness and personal wholeness.

TO ORDER: ITASCA BOOKS—$14.95
(Phone) 1-800-901-3480 (Fax) 1-952-920-0541
(email) orders@itascabooks.com
(Call or email for a 20% discount on 5 or more books)

Workbook also available from amazon.com
A Way of Seeing

If you are who I think you are
I can be angry and you will see
the hurt from which it comes.
You will feel my rage
and know that I believe in you.

If you are who I think you are
you will see disappointment
as grief for the loss
of the love I never knew I had.
You will see my tears as sorrow
watering robust seeds.

If you are who I think you are
I can envy you and you will see
a poorly staked sapling
struggling to find light
amongst wise old trees.

If you are who I think you are,
you will see my greed
as poverty, as desire for more
of what satisfies a part of me
I haven’t come to know.

If you are who I think you are
You will see my obsession
as love tipped awry.

If you are who I think you are
You will love my limitedness.
You will be patient
with my ongoing stretch
towards grace.

If I am who God says I am
I will see all these things in you
and feel grateful
for who I know you are.

-- Marlene Marburg [Victoria, Australia]
Question: How often do people meet with a spiritual guide? And, sometimes when I meet with my spiritual guide a long silence erupts, and I become uncomfortable. What should I do if this happens again?

Hoot Hoot: Thank you for your excellent and common questions. First of all, generally speaking people meet with a spiritual guide once every four to six weeks. If a person is making a guided retreat, meeting times might be more frequent. Some spiritual directors and directees mutually schedule the next date at the conclusion of a meeting time. Others conclude, depart, and then later a person contacts the spiritual director when he or she is ready for another time to meet for spiritual direction. Please talk with your spiritual director to determine the best fit for you. Know that the amount of time between meetings is flexible and may shift during different times of your life, depending on life circumstances.

Your questions about silence are good ones. Often we do not appreciate the gift of silence. We chatter, speak quickly, internally ponder what to do next, or fidget. In spiritual direction silence can be beneficial. Silence allows us to listen to what we may be afraid to speak, or to our story unfolding with new revelation. Silence allows us to digest reality. Silence may be an opportunity to become available to the present moment of here and now, imbued with love, healing, and mystery.

The next time you experience an awkward silence, consider naming it aloud to your spiritual director. Or, try to breathe deeply with peace, knowing the one who occupies the third chair may be inviting you and your guide to understanding, reverence, or wise action. Be still, and listen with an open heart.

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

Memoirs of the Soul

“A how-to guide on writing that is also an escort for the great voyage of the soul. It reminds me of the examen process of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. Simple, profound, and a pathway to living a life of wholeness and balance.”

—Nancy Gallagher, Tune In!

“Sensitive, articulate, direct and clear. Her years of teaching experience are evident in the effortless way she is able to draw out people’s stories without intimidation or the usual fears of self-exposure.”

—Joyce Cameron, Spiritual Directors’ Network of Oregon.

“Phifer offers suggestions on how this book can be used by one person, partners in writing, or in a group workshop setting.”

—Spiritual Woman Newsletter

www.memoirsofthesoul.com
Available at major online bookstores.
“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