



# CONNECTIONS

THE PUBLIC SQUARE OF SPIRITUAL COMPANIONSHIP  
FEBRUARY 2022 VOLUME 31.1

## GENTLE BREATHS AND PEACEFUL STEPS

BY REV. SEIFU ANIL SINGH-MOLARES

*" Please do not build a stupa for me.*

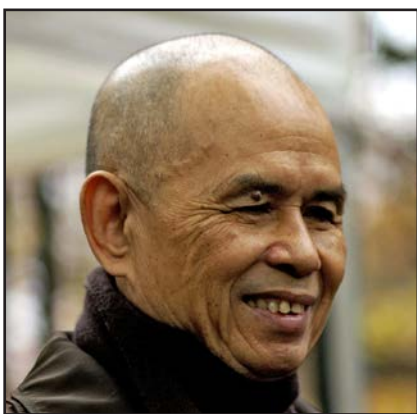
*Please do not put my ashes in a vase, lock me inside,  
and limit who I am.*

*I know this will be difficult for some of you.*

*If you must build a stupa though, please make sure that  
you put a sign on it that says, 'I am not in here.'*

*In addition, you can also put another sign that says, 'I  
am not out there either,' and a third sign that says,  
'If I am anywhere, it is in your mindful breathing and in  
your peaceful steps.'"*

Thich Nhat Hanh



Thich Nhat Hanh, or "Thầy" as he was known to his students, was one of the best known Zen Masters of the last fifty or so years, and is credited with coming up with the term "Engaged Buddhism," a commitment to non-violent social activism

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across a range of issues.

A long time proponent of mindfulness and meditative practices, a peace activist, poet and writer, and a man who always lived his life in accordance with the Buddhist precepts, he died at age 95 a few weeks back. And lived his long life completely scandal free, a true rarity in our day and age.

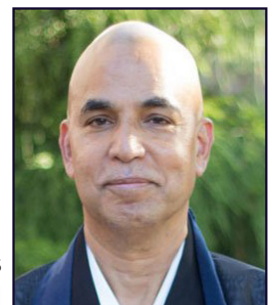
A consummate and very influential teacher, he was a spiritual director, guide, and companion to many. But his teachings always centered beyond his self, as the quote above so beautifully illustrates. And what a wonderful legacy that leaves us with: we are all far more than the temporary bodies and identities we inhabit!

In fact, gentle steps and careful breaths connect us to always more powerfully and completely than any number of accolades we might gather in the course of our transitory existence.

When we resist violence and refuse to give in to anger, we become one with those spiritual leaders across time who committed their lives to the precepts of Love. Likewise, when we listen attentively and act mindfully, we honour the spirit of all those who will come as they struggle to resolve into kindness, no matter the terrible circumstances that might beset them.

Thầy's words convey not just his heart, but all of ours. We are truly connected in a cosmic strand stretching back, manifesting now, and moving forward. Today and Forever. In every moment.

That is the true essence of spiritual companionship.



Rev. SeiFu Anil Singh-Molares  
Executive Director, SDI

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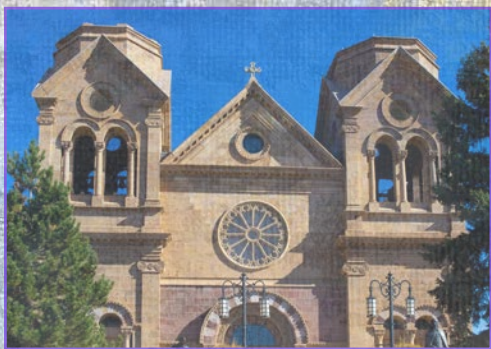


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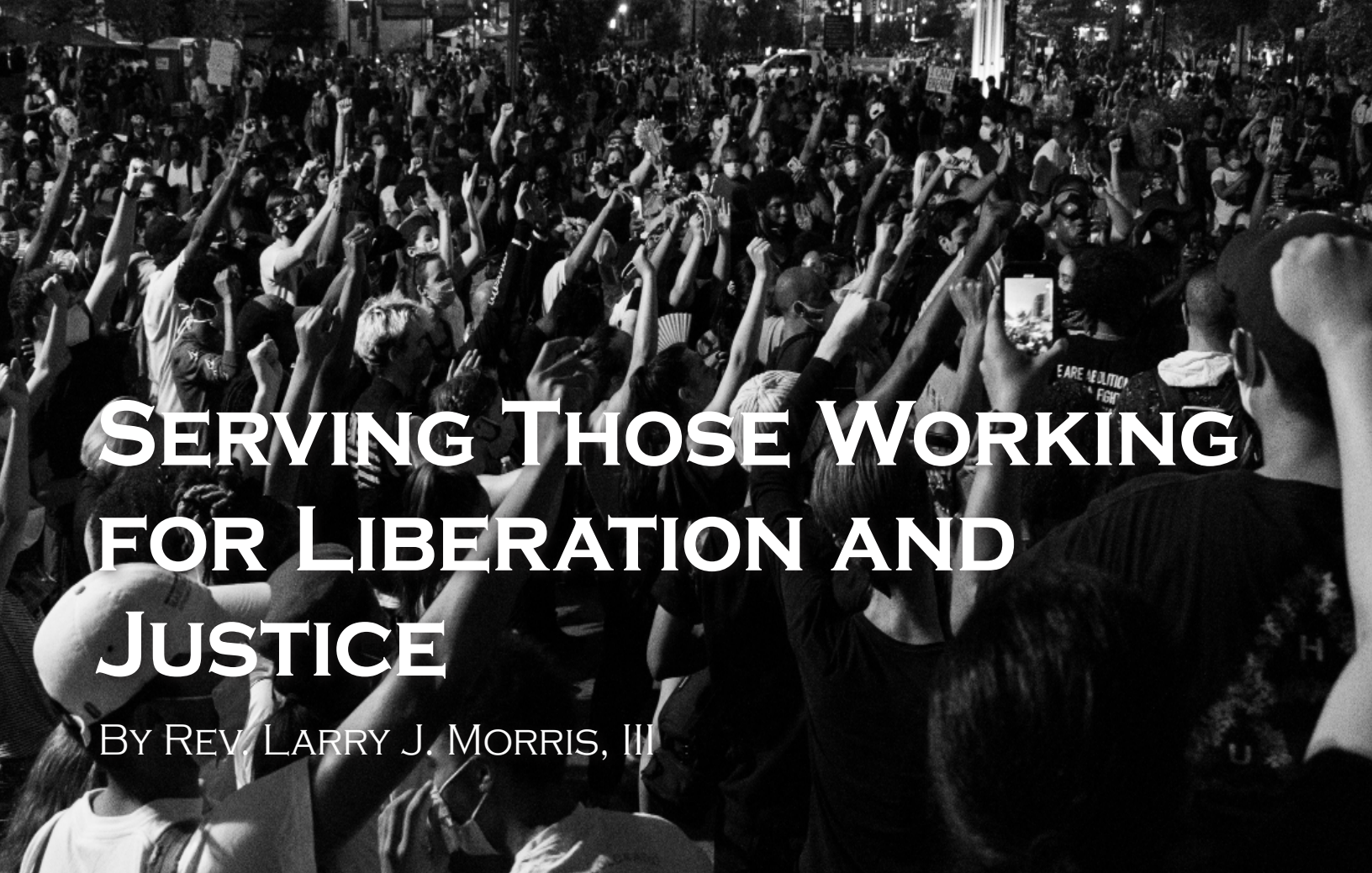
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# SERVING THOSE WORKING FOR LIBERATION AND JUSTICE

BY REV. LARRY J. MORRIS, III

The ministry of spiritual direction and spiritual companionship is a calling. As we seek to answer this call in our lives, many of us often struggle to find our purpose.

*How do we live out this call to provide spiritual accompaniment to others?*

*Who are the people we are called to serve and support?*

One broad and diverse community to consider are those working for justice and liberation. This includes frontline workers like activists, organizers, clergy, religious leaders, writers who focus on justice and liberation, and poets whose poetry brings attention to the injustices in our communities while also offering hope for a more just possibility. People working in the women's liberation movements, racial justice movements, economic justice movements, LGBTQIA+ movements, the Reproductive Justice movement, environmental justice, Black Lives Matter, Human Rights Movements, and public officials. Many of these people don't have safe, confidential, listening spaces to consider their spiritual lives.

I am a spiritual director and a former community organizer. As a person committed to justice and liberation, I benefit from having a spiritual director. The sessions with my director provide space for me to be without pretense or performance. Space for me to consider how my spirit is responding to the ways my physical body and social locations have been received - or not - in this physical world. Space for me to reconnect with myself, to be held in ways I attempt to hold others. To be listened to deeply and to have my words reflected back to me or articulated in ways I have been unable to name for myself. Space for anger and frustration at the injustices of the world. Space to wrestle with my role in perpetuating injustices while also working to dismantle them. A space where shadows can be named and integrated.

I am grateful to have a spiritual companion now, but I often wonder about how my life and work would have benefited from having a spiritual companion when I served as a community organizer. I needed a safe, confidential, listening companion as I wrestled with spirituality and injustice. It would have been helpful to have someone accompany

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me when I asked questions like:

How could the Divine allow so much pain and injustice?

How could people of faith allow so much pain and injustice?

How can I hold on to joy in this work of justice and liberation?

I spent much of my time holding space for those impacted by gun violence, immigration and deportation issues, and other racist policies that impacted their physical bodies and their emotional and spiritual lives. It left little space to attend to my own life. I wonder: Would I have lasted longer as a community organizer if I had had access to a spiritual companion? If I had someone to be with me in those big questions? I am not sure.

I am where I am now, but my experience - and the wondering about "what if" - helped me to find my purpose as a spiritual director -- which is to provide spiritual companionship for those working for justice and liberation. This work is

never ending, and the journey can be lonely and isolating. But deep listening can make a difference because it offers its own kind of liberation – the freedom to be authentic and to accept yourself beyond performance and pretense, with patience and love.

Here are two practical tips on beginning a practice with directees engaged in justice and liberation movements:

**Cultivate relationships with organizations and movements you know** and may already support. When I started my practice, I reached out to places where I had worked previously and to organizations I had volunteered for or supported in some way. I explained to them that spiritual companionship was a new way I could offer support for their work. One tangible benefit of having a spiritual companion is to know that you have a steady place of support and care. This can help counter the burnout and isolation that often affect those who

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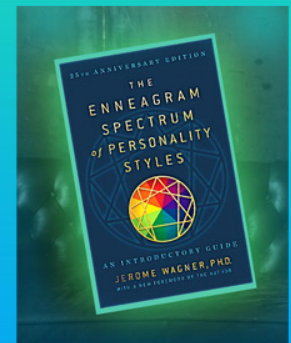
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are engaged in justice and liberation work.

**Write about the intersection of spirituality and justice. Focus on those issues closest to your heart and/or community.** You can offer spiritual insights into a problem, or you can write prayers, meditation or chants that connect with a particular community. Your gift as a spiritual companion can offer a framework for others to enter – where they can begin to articulate what they may have been unable to name, or what they have resisted naming. Your words may also be a confirmation for what’s already been named and experienced.

If you have not considered providing spiritual companionship to those engaged in the work of justice and liberation, may this be an invitation to do so. There are many people on the frontlines of these movements who can benefit from your deep listening care.



**Rev. Larry J. Morris III, (he/they)** describes himself as an apostle, digital marketer, scholar, and spiritual director. They are a co-founder and co-leader of the Communion Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Henderson, NV which seeks to “co-create community, and collectively work towards liberation.” They presented our webinar series on [“Finding a Niche as a Spiritual Director or Companion.”](#) He also works as a Production Assistant for SDI, helping with creative tasks, including generating media for web and print, crafting social media, and helping administer our new Public Square online platform (Larry did the video tutorials.)

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# WHAT IS YOUR NAME FOR THE INFINITE—IN THIS PARTICULAR MOMENT?

BY DR. ROSLYN G. WEINER, PhD, STM

In this brief article I introduce a practice which can be used in group spiritual direction to help participants be present with their changing sense of the Infinite.

I use the word God to talk about infinite, universal, intimate, deep and sacred matters, but it is not the only word I use. I am always alert for metaphors that capture my sense of the “Ultimately Unknowable One.” My name for God changes as my life changes. At the moment, I often use the name “Sacred Source.” But I also use “Rock” and “Place.”

Flexibility in God names is at the heart of this practice. The idea is that the word God can be a “space holder” into which we can place a particular understanding (metaphor) at a particular time, an understanding that changes. It invites us to notice the movement of this understanding over time as an indicator of spiritual movement within ourselves.

Some might wonder: *Is it okay to have more than one name for God?*

The answer is yes, of course. But first, you must give

yourself permission to do what folks in a number of traditions have been doing since ancient times.

Ask yourself: What is my name for God right now? What name do I use when I'm praying from my prayer book? What name do I use when I'm hurting in my heart or in my body and I want to call out? What name do I use when I want to talk to “my friend whom I love deeply”? How has my name for God changed overtime?

*Do you have a name for God?* —is usually the second question I ask when I am starting a new spiritual direction group. (The first is what has drawn you to join us today?) When I am convening a group of seekers who may not know each other and may not come from the same religious tradition, I want sufficient spaciousness in our encounter for God (or however you name the Infinite or whatever is your source of meaning) to be welcomed in language and form meaningful to each person.

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Many years ago, I offered a class on personal psalm writing. I invited students to write a Psalm as a letter to God. I learned the proper form for letters when I was in 3rd grade in elementary school. I knew that there needed to be a salutation, a greeting. Then, there was the body of the letter and then a closing. I began my psalm class by saying, "Let's begin with a salutation. *Dear*" and then I paused. I looked around the room and people were clearly waiting for me to speak. I said, "Well now it's up to you; with what name would you greet God? Dear what, dear who?"

There was still puzzlement.

I had expected the puzzlement and had come prepared. Before the class, I looked at an English translation of the afternoon service recited by traditional Jewish persons either in personal or communal prayer, and I wrote down every name that God was called in this ten-minute service; it filled two columns on a piece of paper. I read the list aloud and then said, "This list doesn't mean that I have captured the name or phrase that you would use. So, begin your letter by writing *Dear* and then

spend some quiet time; see what words occur to you that could be your name for God at this moment."

People did this. Then I said, "Now you can write your letter; whatever you feel like saying to the God that you're addressing in this letter by the salutation that you've chosen, write what you want to write." And people did.

Finally, I said, "How are you going to close?" I explained closing as the space between the body of the letter and the writer's name. I suggested that the closing would reflect something about the relationship between the letter writer and the recipient of the letter. I gave some examples—sincerely yours, best wishes, affectionately, lovingly, many blessings, please help me—and then I said, "But, the choice is yours. So, sit quietly and notice how you're feeling about God at this moment. Is the relationship more horizontal, vertical, formal, or informal, satisfying, not satisfying? It's your unique letter, so it's your unique closing phrase. Complete your letter; put in your closing phrase." And my students completed their psalms and then shared



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them with each other.

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I still think about that class. Participants discovered that the word God did not have to be static. Instead, it could be elastic — stretching to make room for their particular understanding at that particular moment.

Noting the different names that arise for God over time can also allow us to note movement in ourselves. Over time, we experience different things and may need God in different ways and alter our spiritual practices to accommodate these shifts. More nuanced understanding permits growth in relationship with God, within us and with each other.

That evening in the psalm writing class, years ago, we shared a recognition of spiritual spaciousness, and that spaciousness motivated more and deeper sharing among members. I wasn't offering spiritual direction then, but I suspect that the experience changed something within each person too.

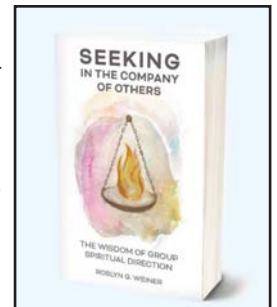
That is why I still ask the same question early on as I encounter a new set of people for group spiritual direction. God, however, we name God as individuals and as a community, is at the heart of our work together. God is ultimately the prime director, but unless we can name that God and refer to that God in the way that intimately resonates within us, we will be withholding a key understanding from ourselves and from each other.

Consider carefully the word to put right after Dear if you're writing God a letter, or sitting in contemplative silence, or seeking to talk meaningfully with other seekers about who or what this Sacred Source is for you.



**Dr. Roslyn G. Weiner, PhD, STM** is the author of the new book from SDI Press, "Seeking in the Company of Others – The Wisdom of Group Spiritual Direction." She is a seasoned spiritual director and psychologist, with 18 years of experience

facilitating groups in spiritual direction. She earned a PhD in psychology from Yale University and an STM degree from the School of Theology, Boston University. And she is about to launch a new column on our website called, "ROZ'S CORNER: A Monthly Q & A on Group Spiritual Direction." The monthly column will appear soon in the "SDI Stories" section of the website. If you have questions about group spiritual direction that you'd like to be answered in the column, please send them [here](#).





# SWADDLED BY DARKNESS

BY REV. ANNALOUIZA ARMENDARIZ

Years ago, I found myself in a slump, a difficult place where I could barely recognize Life. I couldn't understand what was happening. I was only aware that my physical and spiritual body felt foreign. I could barely draw breath. I hurt. I couldn't sleep well, and when I did, tsunami waves of dreams would carry me in restless fits. Even the meager food I ate tasted of ash. As a practicing Christian at the time, I read my *Bible* daily, went to all church services and tried to connect with others in my community but nothing I said seemed to make any sense to anyone. Even in my deepest thoughts, I felt that God couldn't make sense of me. I felt lost in the dark without a god nor a compass to find my way out.

I decided to discuss my darkness with a priest at the cathedral where I had attended for years. I wanted desperately to get back, "into the light," feel the presence of God in my waking moments. The priest listened respectfully and reminded me that God was still with me in spite of my feeling abandoned. The priest (they) offered me a practice that day, bookended with hopeful remarks that I would soon be able to move past this time of "sadness." The point seemed to be that I was "only sad" and that

I had to shake it off and do more to break free from the dark swaddle I found myself inhabiting. The priest told me to read the Psalms out of my *Book of Common Prayer* three times a day. They said that reading the tribulations of King David might help me reconsider that what I was experiencing was nothing compared to King David of the Old Testament. The psalms were not easy to read and in fact, I remember feeling uncomfortable reading them because David did not mince words when it came to discussing suffering or anger at not being heard by God. Reading this made me think that the only enemy was myself because I couldn't get back to the feeling of being connected to God. I wondered how to return to God's inner circle.

The days widened in bleakness as I continued the practice of reading my psalms. During those days, I was offered words of encouragement to get out of this depression. People encouraged me to "look for the light," start a gratitude journal, get up and exercise. But no one asked how it felt to be in the dark. No one mentioned that this dark time might have exponential returns if I just sat with the darkness. So I careened in despair and shame for not being able to pull myself out of the dark valley

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where I found myself.

Months went by and one day I read an article about Shamanism. I learned that there are spiritual practices that honor the dark time of the soul. And there are also practices to call yourself back into the body and prepare to encounter the gifts that can only be cultivated at night. This awareness took me to study herbalism which took me to the homes of Indigenous healers who assured me that the darkness is a beautiful place if only I was open to experiencing it completely. There in dark *temazcales* (Indigenous sweat lodges) I finally met a Jaguar who taught me to see and walk in the darkness, supported and abetted by other animals, plants and Divine Source of all. This event fomented a new aspect of myself: I journey - and can find comfort - in the dark.

I learned that there are gifts I can offer by being neither surprised nor uncomfortable with the darkness that enshrouds others on their Earthly journey. Darkness makes many people uncomfortable because we are encultured to fear anything dark--we fear humans with more melanin,

we fear night, we fear what is unseen. But these are just constructs to diminish our power as Children of Divine Source. We carry the dark and the light in us. When we rest in the night, we are restored in body and our dreams carry us further into a new and engaging present. There is no shame in darkness and night.

In spiritual direction, I hold the container to hear a directee's story, all of it. If they are holding a story that feels heavy, leaden and possibly "too dark to share," then that is the story that I am resourced to hear and hold. It is a sacred time. If I believe that what they are experiencing may be psychosis, I am prepared to support the search for a psychologist/psychiatrist who can hold the body to reach stasis. I believe in allowing everyone the experience, as uncomfortable as it might be, to settle into the dark and honor it. There is no "hurry up and feel better" in my realm. Instead, there is this:

*"Let's settle in, create a campfire with the kindling of love and courage sourced from*

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*our inner being and the Divine Source that holds us all."*

I am called to weave plant medicine, poems and loamy dark thoughts that help us see another rich world. It is in the dark that we learn to see with our beings and not just our physical eyes. Spiritual direction encompasses aspects that have been with all of us for millennia but have been forgotten. It is the Indigenous wisdom that asks that we give thanks for all that is on this continuum of a moment -- from the first spark of light to the final winking embers that we mistakenly call the end.

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As a spiritual director, I find that people struggling to find a sense of the Divine in their lives often encounter difficulties when expressing what it is that they are living.

A question may arise: How does one as spiritual director navigate what could be a Dark Night of the Soul versus a psychosis that needs tending by trained doctors?

The key is listening. Our initial conversations with clients create a spiritual history that could pin-point

Spirit moving deeply in this person's life. In the intake, do you notice patterns of retreating from others and despairing, or is the client a seeker, moving along and growing in their spirituality? Do you recognize despair of living or rather a bewildered belief that something is missing, and the journey is to tap into the quiet murmurs of The Divine? Is the client in the dark shadow world and can you, as a spiritual director, be in that space to accompany the client?

This is also a great issue to take to supervision.



**Rev. Annalouiza Armendariz** is a spiritual director who has spent decades serving people with disabilities, (MA Bilingual Special Education), social activists who support marginalized humans, (Standing Rock), and those who are unhoused, underrepresented and underappreciated. She enjoys playing as a form of worship to Divine Source. When she is not creating sacred containers for kin and kith of all types, (children, forests, birds, stones), she trail-runs, mountain bikes and fishes in mountain creeks. She embodies joy when stories are shared, and we collectively move toward The One.



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# RECEIVE THIS LOVE

BY CELIA MCBRIDE

One of the most profound experiences I've ever had as a directee took place during an eight-day silent retreat when I allowed myself to be fully seen and fully held by a spiritual director for the first time.

I was still fairly new to the practice. I'd only discovered that spiritual direction was even a thing 18 months previous, during a three-day silent retreat at the same Centre. I'd received two sessions from [Lois Huey-Heck](#) during those three days and then I'd gone back to my life. Now, a year and a half later, I was more than ready to receive Lois's loving accompaniment again.

This time around, I was processing a number of losses and changes. Each day of silence brought hours of opportunity to pray and meditate. I was eager to release my grief.

In response to my prayer, an interior voice began to speak, offering words of unconditional love. The words seemed to be coming from my heart rather than my head, and the Voice seemed to be both me and not me, coming through me and yet from beyond me.

*Whenever you are hurt, I am there to love you. When no one else loves you, I love you. I will never leave you. I am always with you and I am always loving you.*

It struck me that if I was loved no matter what I did and no matter what had been done to me, then forgiveness was a given because there was actually nothing to forgive.

*Love is here. Love is real and contempt has no place, no place in humanity.*

I began to understand that Unconditional Love must truly be the Engine of the Cosmos.

*Receive this Love. Offer this Love. Love the suffering. Respond with compassion.*

These four directives were simple enough but also totally overwhelming. How could I live up to them let alone live them out?

"All you have to do is keep making space within you," Lois said when I told her what I'd heard. "Create that space for this Love to have a home inside you."

"I'm scared," I responded, "it's too painful, it hurts too much."

"Could you give 'scared' a sound? What if you just let your voice express that fear and that hurt."

I hesitated. I'd had experienced howling in the

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woods for therapy. But there were houses around us. People might hear. I decided to go for it. I needed healing. A deep moan came up from my chest. It was uncomfortable. I didn't want to do it, but I just kept on groaning and whining, trying to let it out. Fear held me back.

"I don't want to."

"You don't want to what?"

"I don't want to scream so loud they'll hear me in the house next door." This brought tears. "I don't want to scream so loud the boards come away from the house."

"You don't want to scream so loud the boards come away from the house," Lois repeated.

Her simple repetition of my own statement encouraged me to keep pushing the sound past my throat and into the room at full volume, bringing with it sobs that poured out my pain.

Lois let me weep. And then when it was just the

right time, she said, "That Love is for you."

"I don't know why," I cried.

"You never need to know why. You only need to know that it is your gift, and you deserve it."

"I deserve it," I repeated.

"Yes, you deserve it"

"I deserve it," I said again, the truth bringing up more deep sobs.

"You do," said Lois, "You are absolutely worthy of this gift."

"I accept it," I said.

"And that is your gift. In accepting this Love you have returned the gift to its Source."

I nodded, the tears still streaming down my face.

"I'm going to touch your feet," she said. Lois got

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up from her chair, knelt on the floor and placed her hands on the tops of my feet. It was odd, at first, to have her kneeling before me with her head bowed. The pressure of her hands was warm, and I closed my eyes to receive her compassion. What came forth was an embodied image. I became a king sitting on a throne. But I knew the power was Love's not mine.

Five years later I completed the [SoulGuiding](#) Program with Pacific Jubilee and began to offer spiritual accompaniment to others. I have never done exactly what Lois did. I have never taken Lois' unconventional approach by suggesting to a directee that they moan or wail and I have never placed my hands on anyone's feet. But if Love guided me to do so, you can bet that I would.



*Celia McBride is a yoga teacher, creative practitioner and Jubilee-trained spiritual director who provides accompaniment and supervision from her home in Port Hope, Ontario. This story is an excerpt from her book O My God: An Un-Becoming Journey, to be published with*

*Tellwell in the spring. For more about Celia please visit [celiamcbride.com](http://celiamcbride.com).*

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# SETTING ASIDE TIME FOR YOUR CALLING AS A SPIRITUAL COMPANION

BY BETH G. RAPS, PHD

I'm guessing that many of you reading these words right now would like to make a living - or at least part of a living - doing spiritual direction and/or spiritual companionship.

The first hurdle is setting aside the time for what's most important in making that happen.

This article seeks to help you do just that.

There are things we set time aside for. Brushing our teeth, walking the dog, spiritual practice, working for pay, making meals.

Notice that some of these are scheduled and some are unscheduled. The unscheduled things just happen, but we make sure that they happen. If something gets in the way of walking the dog at 5pm, we walk the dog later. But we walk the dog. Likewise, making meals and brushing our teeth.

When we work for pay, we may do so on a scheduled basis (say, from 9-5) or an unscheduled basis: we may be freelancers who can work when we like as long as we get the job done.

My point is to ask you to notice how you feel about the things you schedule versus the things you don't. Notice that the unscheduled things you must

do (like brushing your teeth or walking your dog) seldom interrupt your scheduled activities. Instead, you fit the unscheduled things around what has been scheduled in your calendar. Our whole week revolves around those scheduled things.

Now, what if you are trying to build in more time to develop your paying practice as a spiritual companion or director?

You might try to fit it in around your scheduled activities. Of course, it might get short shrift some weeks. It might even get short shrift every week. If this is the case for you, it's worth noticing that it's normal for people not to get around to unscheduled things.

But it's also worth noticing, that you could change your approach.

How could you change it? Well, you could make building your paying practice a must-do. That might help.

But what if you feel deep down it already is "a must," and you're still not doing it?

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That means that making it “a must” isn’t enough. It might even be making things harder because making it “a must” has so far only created inner conflict or guilt and self-pressuring.

I propose a more effective approach is simply to open your calendar and schedule time to build up your paying practice.

This seems to be the turning point for people who do build up a paying practice. Even though no one may be paying you yet to do this work your heart calls you to do, you schedule time as though they are. You begin acting as if your calling is your work. It doesn’t need to dominate your week. It just needs to be scheduled.

Scheduling time for building your practice as a spiritual director or companion is (in my experience) the simplest way to honor your heart, honor your calling, and build a paying practice. In my SDI webinar, “Follow Your Calling Without Quitting Your Job,” many people were surprised at how much time they were giving away to others because their calling as spiritual directors and companions didn’t have external deadlines. Time for it wasn’t scheduled. They had set no boundaries around it, protecting it.

Time for their practice as spiritual companions and directors was, as it were, “only” for themselves.

And in that word “only,” we can discern much.

Setting aside time felt “selfish.”

But if we examine this, we have to question whether it is really selfishness that drives us to serve. I don’t think so. (It’s also good to ask ourselves if we feel selfish every time we make space to do something that is nourishing for our souls and hearts.)

Keeping your scheduled time holy is the other half of scheduling it. It takes work, it takes inner-dialogue and it may take a new level of contemplative self-honesty about what is really getting in our way—including within us. Most especially within us.

-----

There are reasons we aren’t already setting aside the time to build our practice. While the reasons vary on the surface, in my experience, they boil down to two primary thoughts:

- I’m not worth it.
- Scheduling is imprisonment. Avoiding scheduling as much as possible is freedom.

Here a few ways that can help you get beyond either of these inhibiting reasons:

- Find the time for your calling by telling yourself the truth. Find the time by seeing your time honestly. Find the time by listening to the voices talking inside your head about your calling. Who is talking? What are they saying?
- Carve out the time and commit. Write from your heart and publish it. Stop hiding your light under a bushel. Strengthen your existing relationships by nourishing each channel of friendship with your writing, videos, or art you want to share with a wider audience. Forge new relationships the same way. Hold events online (or in person).
- Your soul also has its requirements. If it is unsatisfied, question why and know there is an answer. God, the Universe, or however you name Mystery, would not have put in your soul the call to spiritual companionship or direction without giving you a means to respond to it.
- It’s a freewill Universe. You are empowered to ignore the call or never schedule time to respond to it (even as you schedule many other things) and you are empowered to ignore the means you have at hand to respond to it. If you are doing this because it feels like sacrifice, and sacrifice feels good, question what is being sacrificed. “Sacrifice” means to make sacred. Are

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you making your will sacred? Are you making your ego sacred? Are you making your masochism sacred? What are you making sacred when you sacrifice your deepest desires and dreams?

- Focus on your calling even if it is simply to sit and do nothing. If you set aside time for your calling, keep it. Don't do anything else. Soon, you will develop a list of things you need and want to do to build your practice and monetize it. For inspiration, see George Kao.

Spiritual directors and companions are trained to give their full attention to the people they companion. Can you be present in the same way for yourself? Can you value yourself as you value your directee? Consider the following radical proposals:

- Value your time.
- Value yourself.
- Value your call.

The way we do this in 3-D reality is to set aside time. The way we value most things is by giving them our attention, our focus. Attention is a substance more precious than gold. Cultivating attention requires time. Time requires scheduling. It's common sense. Do you deny yourself your own attention? What would happen if you gave yourself the gift of your full attention? What would happen if you set aside time to cultivate just this experience? What would happen to the relationship you have with your calling?

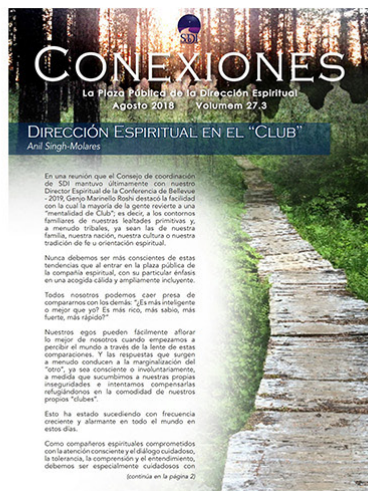


**Beth G. Raps, PhD** – Beth coaches people serious about changing lives--their own included--who need to restructure their time, money, or mindset. Her SDI profile is here: <https://www.sdicompanions.org/sdi-profile/beth-raps/> and she welcomes

questions and contact. Her SDI "Public Square" groups are *Mysticism, Intersectionality, Making a Living, Interspirituality, Public Square, and Anti-Racism.*

# Bienvenidos a todos!

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# IN PRAISE OF SLOW

BY DR. JEANETTE BANASHAK

*"The times are urgent, let us slow down."  
-Bayo Akomolafe*

The slow movement began in the 1980s in Italy as a response to the opening of a McDonald's fast-food restaurant in Rome. Since then it has grown into a movement that includes slow travel, slow cities, slow money, slow schools, slow living, slow books, slow art, slow parenting, slow medicine, slow technology, slow musicians touring slowly and more. It is a movement towards meaningful connection between humans and with the more-than-human world. The "slow" movement involves a change of attitude, a mindset, and practice, as well as a cultural shift that values simplicity over efficiency, collaboration over competition.

Of course, spiritual directors and companions have been participating "slow" spiritual care since the beginning of our calling. Spiritual directors are in the habit of sitting or walking with an individual (or group) and "with-nessing"\* the unfolding process of change over time. In each session, we listen deeply and lovingly to recognize distractions and connect with priorities. Throughout the lifetime of a relationship between spiritual guide and seeker, we do not rush change, but rather, with open heart-minds, we consider the questions together as we participate in the slow movements that effect the harmonizing of our lives. We look for signs of movement, signs of growth that might look like interior freedom and trust of self and the Divine.

We wait and listen for greater flexibility and less judgmentalism, for less fear and more courage, for deepened listening and increased self-compassion. We attend our companions' awakening to the practices of charity and hospitality, to their learning, to their deepened and different friendships, to their justice-centering.

It might feel to a spiritual director or companion that nothing is happening for the seeker because they tell the same stories and respond to situations and people in the same ways month after month. A spiritual guide might even ask themselves, "What are we really doing here?"

But when we participate in the slow movement of spiritual guidance, we ask a different question:

*"How are we being here?"*

Living into this question takes time, patience, and perseverance; it takes trusting in the unhurried nature of engaging with our spiritual/religious/ethical traditions and the universal and unique questions we hold.

May we practice spiritual guidance with a gentle pace, ever trusting that there is always motion, even when we do not see or hear it.

\*Philosopher, poet and spiritual companion Bayo Akomolafe explains the word "with-nessing" at 7 min. 49 [on this podcast.](#)

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Dr. Jeanette Banashak is a queer and bilingual inter-spiritual and interreligious companion. She has a diploma in shinrin yoku (forest bathing) and guides people of all ages in immersion experiences as an act of justice. Jeanette is the co-

founder/director of [The Spiritual Guidance Training Institute](#), an organization providing training in spiritual direction/companionship. Jeanette is an author and also teaches social and emotional learning and development at Erikson Institute and spiritual direction at the Graduate Theological Foundation.

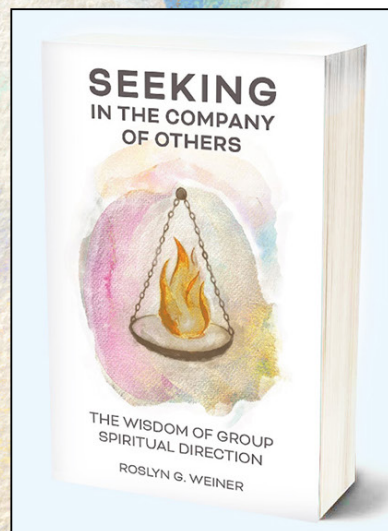
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