



**SPIRITUAL DIRECTION FOR
SKEPTICS:
DISALLOWED DIALOGUE AROUND
LANGUAGE OF LONGING**

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DISCLAIMERS

I.E. IT'S YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO DISCERN WHAT, IF ANY OF THIS, IS HELPFUL TO YOU AND TO DISCARD THE REST

This is some of what informs the observations, reflections, and perspectives I share here

- MD (USA, retired from medicine 2019)**
- Masters Theological Studies 2008
- Social Sciences research in forgiveness 2011-2014
- MA Spiritual Care and Psychotherapy 2021**
 - ** this is not medical or therapeutic advice
- *Lev Shomea* (Listening Heart) Spiritual Direction training 2010
- SoulWise Listening



OUTLINE

- Notice how current usage of language +/- cultural paradigms limit understanding and explorations of some fundamental human dimensions
- Consider potentially useful definitions to talk about what we can't talk about
- Understanding Spiritual Direction
- Spiritual Direction vs Psychotherapy
- Contraindications to Spiritual Direction
- Resources
- Discussion



THINGS WE CAN'T TALK ABOUT...

- Politics
- Religion
- What else?

Weather

Gender

Values – Beliefs*

Spiritual – Direction – God

Freedom/ censorship

Safety/ greater good

Social justice



LOST LANGUAGE

- Awe
- Wonder
- Reverence
- Longing/ Fullness
- Blessings/ Flow
- Joy/ Sorrow
- Meaning/ Intrinsic worth
- Responsibility/ Devotional Relationship
- Sometimes expressed through:
 - Laughter Tears Music
 - Dance Poetry Contemplation



RELIGION AND POWER

True or False?

- “Religion is regarded by the common people as true, by the wise as false, and by rulers as useful.”
— **Seneca (1st century CE)**

Wise or Foolish?

- "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."
— **Proverbs 9:10 (~800 BCE)**

Who/ what frightens ruling elites?

- Prophets
- Those who bow to a higher authority
- Those who live compassion and truth



SPIRITUAL? RELIGIOUS? WHOLE?

- Spiritual
 - Part of or an escape from reality?
 - Spiritual +/- theistic -- sense of meaning, purpose, sacred values/relationships/activities
 - Connection to more than the physical world (Seigel's 8th sense "M/We")
 - Collective unconscious (Jung)
- Religious
 - Wisdom traditions may be a helpful way to think of it
- Imaginal Realm
 - Felt sense (Gendlin) Numinous/ Sacred space-time
 - Expanded and connected consciousness that is clear, present, compassionate, alive



WHAT IS SPIRITUAL DIRECTION?

[HTTPS://WWW.SDICOMPANIONS.ORG/ABOUT/WHAT-IS-SPIRITUAL-DIRECTION-AND-COMPANIONSHIP/](https://www.sdicompanions.org/about/what-is-spiritual-direction-and-companionship/)

“Spiritual direction is a time-honored term for a conversation, ordinarily between two persons, in which one person consults another, more spiritually experienced person about the ways in which God [or however one names the Divine, Holy or Universal] may be touching her or his life, directly or indirectly. In our postmodern age, many people dislike the term ‘spiritual direction’ because it sounds like one person giving directions, or orders, to another. They prefer ‘spiritual companionship,’ ‘tending the holy,’ or some other nomenclature. What we call it doesn’t make any real difference. The reality remains conversations about life in the light of faith... Although spiritual direction has had a burst of new life, it is really quite ancient. Across both the Hebrew and the Christian Scriptures, we find people seeking spiritual counsel. The Queen of Sheba sought out the wisdom of Solomon. Jesus gave us examples in his conversations with Nicodemus, with the woman at the well, in the ongoing formation of Peter and the other disciples. In the early church, people flocked to hermits in the desert for spiritual counsel. Across the centuries we find striking examples in some Irish monks, in some German Benedictine nuns, in Charles de Foucault, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Francis de Sales, and others. Today, spiritual directors come from many traditions ... [including Judaism, Sufism, Buddhism and other faiths].” ~ Marian Cowan, CSJ



[HTTPS://WWW.SDICOMPANIONS.ORG](https://www.sdicompanions.org)

- <https://www.sdicompanions.org/about/welcome/>
 - Welcome
 - Descriptions/ Definitions/ Discussions
 - Resources
- <https://www.sdicompanions.org/media/guidelines-for-ethical-conduct/>
 - Spiritual directors/ companions recognize the responsibility that comes with this sacred work
 - “Engagement agreement” to clarify roles/ expectations
 - Importance of supervision
- <https://www.sdicompanions.org/find-a-spiritual-director-companion/>
 - Affiliations/ focus/ interests/ locations



PERSONAL STORY OF SD TRAINING

- *Lev Shomea* Jewish Spiritual Direction training program (2008-2010)
 - (The email invitation to the program was supposed to have gone out only to rabbis)
- King Solomon said “...give your servant a *lev shomea* to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong” (1 Kings 3:9)
 - Hebrew *lev shomea* can be translated as “listening heart” or “discerning mind”
- “You are not here to ‘fix’ anything”
- A contemplative approach to deep listening to where/ how the Divine is present – or not – in the seeker’s life, listening to/ for their heart’s longing



SPIRITUAL DIRECTION VS. PSYCHOTHERAPY

- Complementary but not the same thing
 - Psychotherapy is regulated profession whereas spiritual direction might be considered a vocation or calling
- MA Spiritual Care and Psychotherapy (and never the twain shall meet!?!)
 - Psychotherapy focuses on pathology or disease
 - Spiritual Direction focuses on health and the stuff of life
- Helpful guideline (from a colleague LCSW and SD, who is now only doing spiritual direction):
 - Clinicians are responsible *for* their patients.
 - Spiritual mentors are responsible *to* their mentees.



PREREQUISITES FOR SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

- Mentally stable individuals capable of self-reflection and conversation
- Not therapy, so not appropriate for those suffering from things such as addictions*, suicidal ideation, personality disorders, delirium, or psychosis
- *where individuals in the throes of addiction are receiving comprehensive treatments, spiritual care with likely be part of that care. Spiritual Direction may complement recovery



RESOURCES

- SDICompanions.org
- Retreat Centers
- Training programs
 - Seminaries
 - Institutes associated with particular faith traditions
- Some psychotherapists or chaplains** (be discerning!)

- Set the intention to honor your heart's longing to come alive and to find a spiritual director or companion to accompany you – trust the journey
- A spiritual direction relationship needs to be a good fit – trust your gut



SUMMARY

- Spiritual awareness, sense of sacred, wisdom traditions, appreciation of cultural beauty are all important aspects of being human
- Precious – and subject to internal and/or external threats
- A Spiritual Direction or Companionship relationship can help focus our attention on these dimensions of life and help us be accountable to our own lives
- Contemplative listening can help us hear our own sacred stories and come alive

