

THE MIDDLE WAY OF SPIRITUAL COMPANIONSHIP

In our spiritual journeys, we all experience moments of unforgiving darkness, times when we are lost to ourselves, and where we may feel hopeless and forsaken. On these occasions, many of us withdraw deep within, in an attempt to envelop and buffer our pain by separating from the world. And as we cut our links to the outside, we may become increasingly isolated and unmoored, spiraling further and further into blackness. We become lonely souls, rowing across a forlorn Universe, empty of purpose and redemptive meaning.

Of course, this is a perfect time to reach out to a spiritual companion/director. During these dark periods, they can be wonderfully nurturing sounding boards, rebalancing us with trust, acceptance free of judgement, great understanding, compassion, and deep listening. And by being able to exteriorize some of our sorrows and longings, we will begin to realize that our dreadful moments are actually the springboards for great awakening and insight. The darkness then turns from bleak to warm, from lonely to all-encompassing, from fear to courage, and from despair to Pure Love. And instead of torments, we will experience God's gentle caresses, and our hearts will lift.

And as they do, we will shift to the mountaintop, filled with joy, as we align more closely with the Universe, and everything flows with ease, leaving us giddy with hope. We will then celebrate, and savor the happy occasion. And our spiritual companions will celebrate with us.

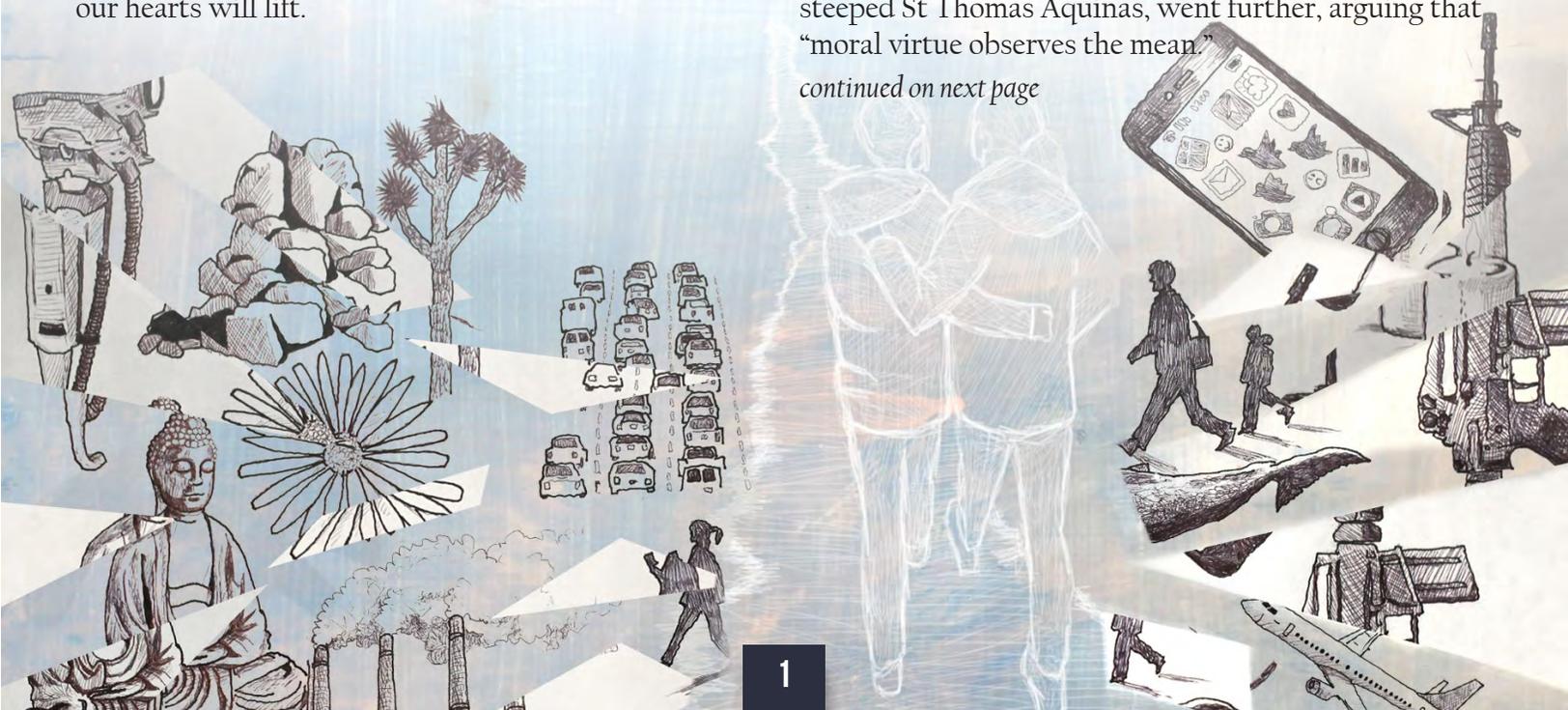
These moments of transcendence, ephemeral as they may be, will also motivate and inspire us to either initiate or reinvigorate our efforts as spiritual companions to others.

And yet, it's hard to escape the conclusion that we might be swinging between extremes.

The ancient Greek philosophers spoke often of the "Golden Mean," by which they meant positioning ourselves away from the utmost ends of a dichotomy, so as to avoid falling off the edges into recklessness, or intransigence. "Beauty," as they conceived it, was all about symmetry, proportion and harmony.

Christian Scholastics, in particular the Aristotelian steeped St Thomas Aquinas, went further, arguing that "moral virtue observes the mean."

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THE MIDDLE WAY OF SPIRITUAL COMPANIONSHIP (CONTINUED)

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The Buddha was a child of great privilege, and his father went to significant lengths to protect him from seeing the suffering of the world. Slipping out of the palace walls, he saw death, poverty and misery first hand. Which led him to flee the palace and to immerse himself in the most arduous and challenging ascetic practices he could identify.

His “enlightenment” resulted when he saw that the most stable, balanced way forward was to avoid indulging extremes, and to hew to a “Middle Way.”

And this Golden Mean, or Middle Way, finds equal expression in the Quran, with Muhammed (pbuh) stating “خير الأمور أوسطها”, meaning the best choice is the middle one.

These are but a few examples, as Judaism (with Maimonides, for instance), Confucianism, Indigenous spiritualities of various sorts, and many others across the board, speak similarly of the need to ground ourselves away from polarities.

In this context, trained spiritual companions and directors know that our biggest struggles are associated with what many perceive as the ultimate dichotomy, namely Life and Death. So, our births are usually cause for great celebration, hope for the future, and the promise of things to come. And our deaths are mourned, and often met with cries of sadness, loss, sorrow, longing and regret.

But as we persist with our spiritual paths, our companions listen us deeper and closer to the heart of the matter, far beyond opposites and dualities. We don't deny the latter, as the denials would be extreme themselves, but as we navigate our moments of despairing sorrow on the one end, and those of joyful ecstasies on the other, we may find that true peace of mind lies in the middle spaces. Those where we are truly one with each other, and where we remember that our essence is beyond yesterdays, todays and tomorrows.

The entire universe is contained within us, and every particle of God, the Universe, beyond the beyond, or however we might refer to the ground of all being, is

us, always and forever.

When we find the middle ground, with the help of our spiritual companions when we need them, or by helping others find that space when they need it, we can remember our Ultimate Belonging in every molecule of an expanding, infinite Universe.

May we find ourselves steeped in between: quietly, serenely, and with humility, insight and understanding.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, who always was, and who is still to come, the Almighty One” (Revelation 1:8).

“Never was there a time when I did not exist, nor you...nor in the future shall any of us cease to be” (Bhagavad Gita 2.12)



Reverend Seifu Anil Singh-Molares

Listen

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LISTEN@SDIWORLD.ORG



Beyond Heaven and Hell (after William Blake) - Matt Whitney



*The following questions are offered for guidance, journaling, or meditation.
You may wish to share your responses with a spiritual companion.*

- 1. Can you recall a previous encounter with darkness that proved to be a “springboard” into deeper insight or awareness?*
- 2. Do you regularly identify the One at the extreme edges of your life experience? How might you find the One in the “middle” of these polarities?*

If anything arises that you would like to share with the community, please tell us at listen@sdiworld.org.



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PARADOXES FOR THE NEW YEAR

I am utterly insignificant, and yet infinitely valuable

My work and efforts are meaningless, and yet how we spend our lives matters. We must be compelled to respond to 'that of God in everyone'

Individual choice matters, and yet nothing we accomplish in life is the result of our individual efforts

No success, or perceived success, can be claimed by me alone; however, my failures are my responsibility alone

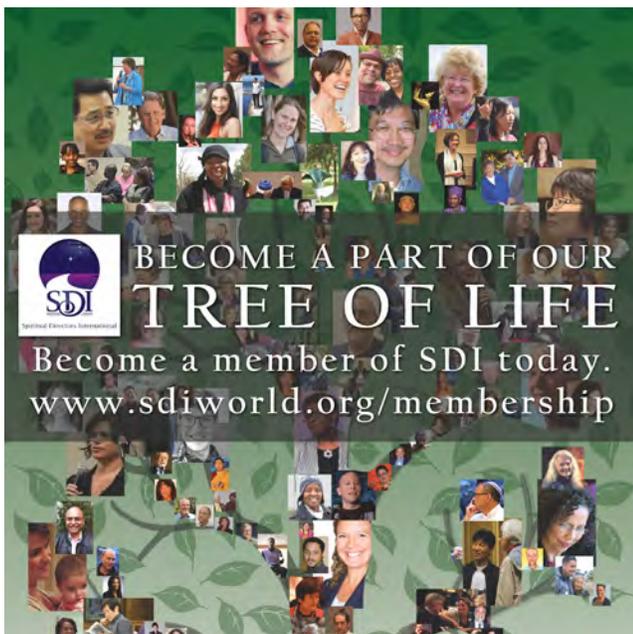
To be alive is infinite ecstasy; to be alive is deep melancholy

Time as we experience it is not real, but a persistent threat is stolen time and attention by trivialities

The world's darkness is not separate from me, I, too, contain worlds of tilted possibility to good or evil

Values are true, in so far as they are embodied
Separation and otherness is a human illusion, our life's work is to bring all living beings into kinship with one another

Denise Hearn is the co-author of *The Myth of Capitalism*.

A graphic for SDI membership featuring a collage of diverse people's faces forming a tree shape. The text reads: "BECOME A PART OF OUR TREE OF LIFE", "Become a member of SDI today.", and "www.sdiworld.org/membership". The SDI logo is also present.

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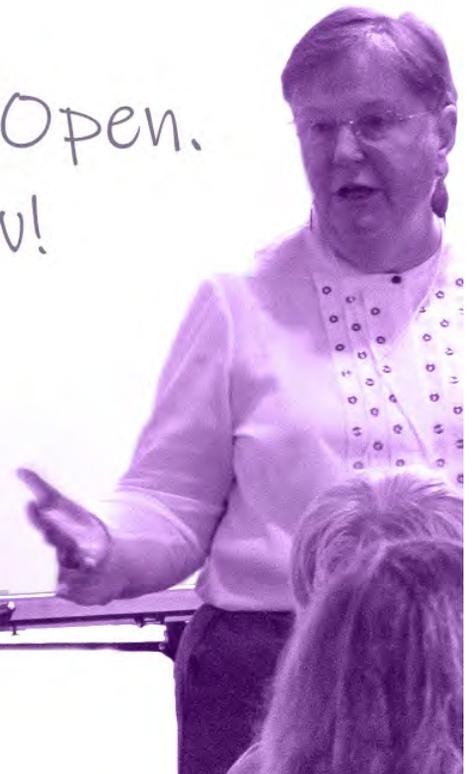
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...we can remember our
Ultimate Belonging in
every particle of an
expanding, infinite Universe.



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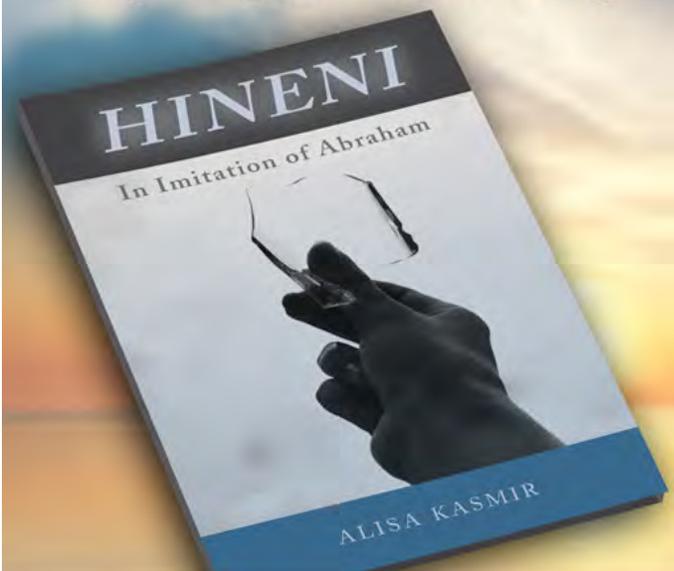
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“In Genesis 22, Abraham says *hineni* three times, ‘here I am.’ Kasmir names the willingness that these words express as the fundamental attitude of spiritual directors. By being open-minded and vulnerable, space is created for directors to perceive God’s word in the narratives of their directees.”

Charles Caspers, Titus Brandsma Institute, Nijmegen

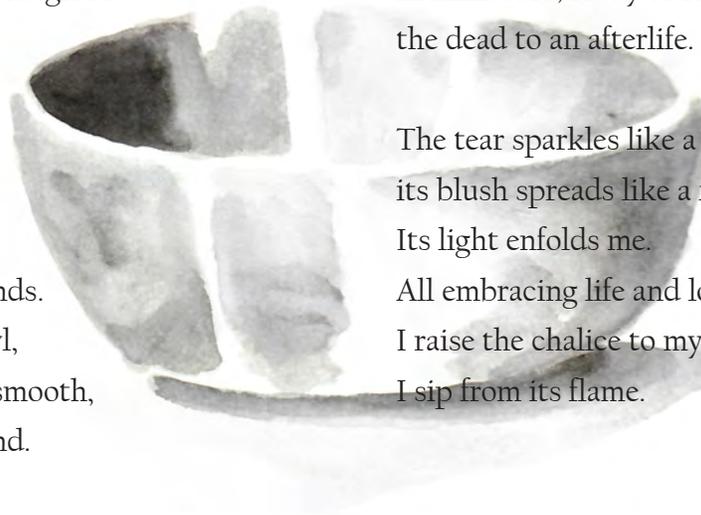
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CHALICE

A chalice I craft
to hold my losses
a chalice
of warm wood
whose carvings surround its globe
as the arms of loved ones
once encircled me.

The foot I craft slender,
to float like a feather
on the ledge where it stands.
I peer down into the bowl,
its round hollow planed smooth,
cupped like a holding hand.

The circle of liquid pooled there
like a sunken mirror reflects
my grieving gaze.



One teardrop slides carefully
onto the aqueous surface.
It does not dissolve.
It anchors like an Egyptian barge
in miniature, ready to ferry
the dead to an afterlife.

The tear sparkles like a ruby,
its blush spreads like a fine Shedah wine.
Its light enfolds me.
All embracing life and love.
I raise the chalice to my lips.
I sip from its flame.

Linda Ankrah-Dove writes about the natural world, climate collapse, the weird workings of society and the spiritual journey. Her book, *Borrowed Glint of Jade*, is available through the author.

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OUR IDEAL SESSION

If you tell me how happy you are sending shoeboxes of toys to Romanian Gypsy children and sharing the Good News of their savior Jesus...

I will listen with compassion.

If you tell me how happy you are observing a kosher kitchen and seeing Bibi save Israel from Palestinian hordes...

I will listen with compassion.

If you tell me how happy you are meditating toward Awareness and believing there is no personal god but salvation through awareness of suffering and compassion...

I will listen with compassion.

If you tell me how happy you are dancing naked under the Beltane moon and knowing your spirit animal ...

I will listen with compassion.

If you tell me how happy you are speaking in tongues and being slain in the Holy Spirit...

I will listen with compassion.

I will listen as a human who has offered herself to the hungry tigress. The tigress who will eat me and watch as I transform for a time into the listening wind.

Cathy Carlson Reynolds, a lay Third Order Franciscan, is a student in the Spiritual Guidance Training Institute and lives in Williamsburg, Virginia.

SDI ENCOUNTERS

A podcast of Spiritual Directors International

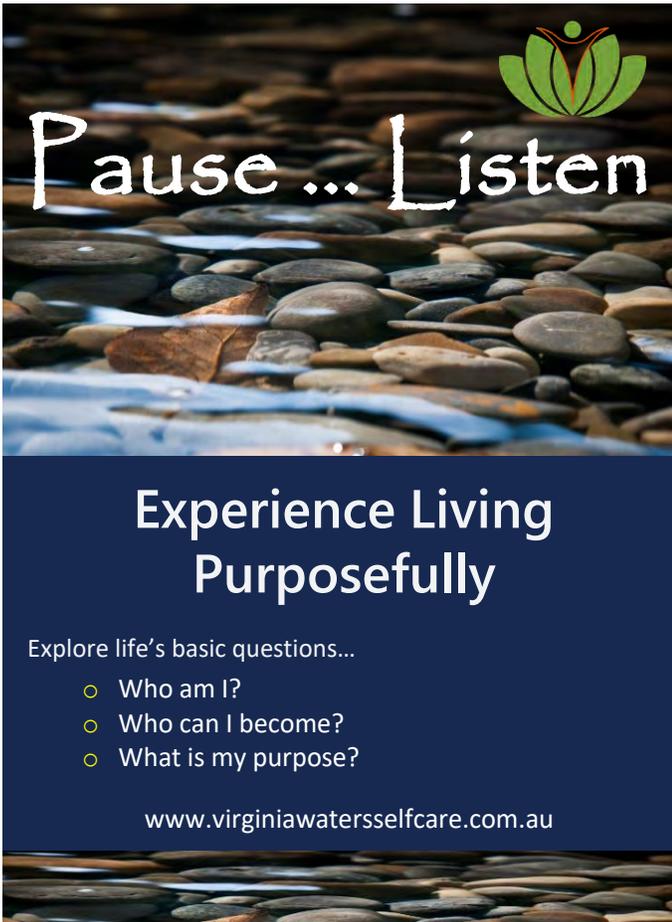
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