**Q&A with Genjo Marinello, on Awakening and Maturity for Spiritual Companions**

**Why did you write this book?**

I wrote it because spiritual companions have been absolutely essential in my own unfolding in my psychological and spiritual development. And, without them, how could we possibly grow? We’d be reinventing the wheel entirely. We’re so lucky to have spiritual companions. They engage with us in a way that is a catalyst for our growth. So, it’s a story of the most significant companions in my spiritual and psychological growth. It goes all the way from my birth, to 2021, and I’m happy to share the bumps in the road that we all face growing up.

**There’s particular lessons and challenges you’ve had in your life that are recounted in this book, but they’re also universal challenges. How might your story be everybody’s story?**

I often say we’re the most complex creature on the planet. Just think about our maturation from an infant to a young adult, let alone further into adulthood and late maturity. It just takes so long – there isn’t any other creature that needs so much nurturing. So that complexity is what unites us. I have my complexities and everybody else has their complexities. How does that work into our unfolding and development? And then we have this interesting capacity for awakening to something well beyond our personal identities and our species identities, and what do you do with that? How do you integrate that?

**A lot of people would assume that awakening and maturity are the same, but in your book they are very distinct. Can you say more about this distinction?**

Every phase of our life feels like a “new life” in a way, because we’ve awakened to spirituality, or sexuality, or companionship. We’ve even awakened very early on that we are not our mother. These are different layers of awakening. But how do you integrate these? That’s the maturing process. At infancy, childhood, young adulthood, etc., these are all various stages of awakening, in which whole new vistas open up. But when you arrive at one of these stages, it can be very bumpy, as all of a sudden you’re no longer in your previous “orbit”, you’re in a new orbit. So awakening is an expansion beyond what we previously understood or knew as reality. Eventually, it expands to the point where you can’t find where the “you” begins, and the rest of the world, or “Spirit”, begins. How do you integrate this? Who am I? That’s a core question that this book addresses.

**There are beings that are wide awake. And yet, that alertness and wakefulness does not translate into ethical action. How can that paradox possibly be? How can one awaken to one’s place in time and space, and even beyond it, while maintaining an immaturity, or even causing harm in an abusive or corrupt manner?**

This can be referred to as spiritual bypassing, where you can get by with the information of the new vista. But, you end up ignoring developmental gaps, or even places of arrested development. The awakening can sometimes make it easier to carry these without integrating them, or digesting them. They can be ignored, which can cause harm to oneself and to others. Awakening can then become a liability, instead of a revelation.

**In your book, you outline the path of spiritual awakening and maturity through two seemingly different lenses – that of The Interior Castle by St. Teresa of Avila, and The Ten Zen Ox Pictures. Why do these two go together, in your view?**

I suspect if I explore deeply other spiritual maps on integrating spiritual development, I would find parallels with all of them. These are two I’ve studied relatively deeply, and it’s been easy to find the parallels, even though they were written hundreds of years apart, by different gendered authors, in very different cultures. Spiritual awakening is like the unfolding of a flower, but that process of unfolding can be described in many different ways. St. Teresa describes this unfolding as moving through different rooms, and each room is an expanded vista or horizon. Even the barriers between the rooms are artificial. They’re kind of discrete, but they overlap. And in any spiritual or mystical tradition

**What might be the appeal for spiritual direction and spiritual companionship in reading a book like this?**

I think people will recognize their own unfolding and awakening, because we share a lot more in common than what make us unique and separate. So anyone’s story is going to stimulate your own story and your own unfolding and make you think about the companions that are important in your life -that have been mentors or teachers or sages that called forth wisdom from you, or bumped you in the right direction. The best teachers invite you to explore or investigate for yourself, and they’re really good at presenting that invitation. My hope is that my own story will invite you to reflect on your own story, and how your spiritual companions became a catalyst for your own spiritual journey.

**You’re a Zen Roshi, you’re a psychotherapist, and a spiritual director. Why is it helpful to have these multiple modalities at your disposal, and why any one of them might not be sufficient?**

I explored all those modalities because they were all needed. I don’t know if I carry more baggage than the next person, but I carried a lot of baggage, and these multiple modalities helped me work through it. When I began this path, I thought I was acquiring all this education in order to help others. But I relatively quickly realized I was needing to help myself, and unscramble a lot of things, and to grow and mature. Zen is a great practice, and my Quaker practice is a great practice, in helping me be with silence, or inner light, that can help us expand our vista of awareness. Great! But then, if you turn that light inward, you should see all of your shortcomings and bruises and traumas and karmic baggage. And how do you untangle that? I needed more than expanding awareness, I needed psychoanalysis and psychology to help me unscramble that baggage.

**Often, maturity is equated with knowledge acquisition. But in reading your book, one comes to the opposite conclusion, in which the more you acquire, the less you have.**

When I examine the human condition, the planet’s condition, I’m left with more mysteries than answers. This learning how to deal with “not knowing” is a lot of what I think maturity is about. So the more you know, the less you know, and the more questions that you have. And the more that you’re able to see the complexity of your own condition, the cultural condition, and the complexities of the planet and the cosmos, you scratch your head and you’re left with “I don’t know”.

In regard to the entirety of the history of the cosmos, human history at 200,000 years is very young, and is really in its adolescent stage. How do we get to where we’re going? I don’t know. Will we survive our adolescence? I don’t know. But do I have the tools to explore and investigate these big questions? Yeah, I think I have those tools at this point. Awakening and maturity on the spiritual journey are about gaining the capacity to tolerate not knowing, and the ability to go on in faith of experience and what is beyond. *Something* is carrying us along, so let’s go along for the ride.