

THE SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR PUBLIC SQUARE: INTIMATE STRANGERS

When I was younger, I used to travel across all of the train stations of Europe, not knowing from one moment to the next whether I was going to hop on a train, or leave a particular city. My encounters with individuals on those trains were wonderful and multifaceted, and yielded some of the most intimate conversations I have ever had. By their own account, people revealed themselves to me and shared secrets and insights that they would not have told even their spouses or closest friends, precisely because I was a stranger, and they knew I would be off at the next stop, with my quick departure, never to return, ensuring the safety of their confidences.

Spiritual directors seek to create the same kind of space: one of deep intimacy, one where the people we companion feel they can unmask and reveal themselves at their deepest level - without negative consequences or untoward judgements.

So in a way, spiritual companions are "Intimate Strangers." That is, strangers one moment, and intimates the next! We have to inspire trust and safety in equal measure, to facilitate those important conversations around our deepest aspirations and longings, namely our desire to be connected with God/Brahman/Tao/Nirvana..., or however you might name the ground of all being.

And because we cannot predict who we might encounter seeking spiritual companionship, anymore than who comes on a train, this also means being able to speak to anyone, regardless of their age, gender orientation, race, or any other characteristic. It means being able to reach the essence - gracefully, honorably, deeply - without shortcuts or abbreviations.

And that is exactly what we did at SDI's yearly conference in St Louis, Missouri recently.

Over four hundred spiritual companions met in that city, around



the theme of Seeking Connection Through Diversity. We had unprecedented representation and manifestation in terms of race, gender, age, and religious and spiritual identity; very prominently on stage, as well as off it.

Our keynote speakers, Mirabai Starr, Rev angel Kyodo williams, and Fr. Richard Rohr, offered three very different but complimentary takes on diversity, each from their own unique viewpoints. Mirabai spoke about the divine feminine, and the importance of women taking control of the spiritual dialogue, now that an older generation of (mostly male) esteemed spiritual leaders is in the process of moving on; Rev angel spoke of the importance of “going deep” in addressing racial and gender inequities, and tying that into her focus on liberation and social action; while Fr. Richard addressed us with the need to shed many of our tribal prejudices to embrace the essential universality of our religious traditions, in his case through the lens of the essence of Christ, which as he pointed out is not “Jesus’ last name.”

We had twenty-two workshops and six institutes, covering a wide gamut of topics, everything from Interspirituality, to addressing systemic racism, storytelling and spiritual companionship, mindfulness, among many others.

And so a rich, dense, and complex texture was woven over five days, interspersed with many moments of contemplation, reflection, insight and discernment.

We mingled, we meditated together, we ate together, we laughed and cried together. And like good spiritual directors, we listened to one another.

And, as I have written about in past SDI publications, we did so while staying true to ourselves, without sacrificing who we are, warts and all. In our essences and confident of our identities, however we might manifest them, but also open, tolerant, and mindful of the views and inclinations of others.

Even when someone expressed a viewpoint or perspective that differed from our own, sometimes radically, we remained true and confident in our own spiritual identities, and listened intently and respectfully.

And so this spiritual director public square started to manifest in a way that it hadn’t before. And it was “messy,” busy, crowded, and spirited, as most public squares are, but joyful and uplifting and deeply contemplative at the same time.

Because spiritual companions most assuredly do not play in shallow waters, this deep and overwhelming immersion into the Great Beyond, was what we were looking for and needing. A lot of fruitful and generative splashing on the profound end!

All of this is relevant to those of you interested in spiritual direction/companionship, because you don’t play in shallow waters either.

And because at SDI you can trust that regardless of your background, faith tradition/spiritual inclination, gender identity, age, race, you are welcome!

St Louis was a great start in so many ways. And a wonderful development on the sturdy foundation of tolerance and understanding bequeathed to us by SDI’s founders, and the successive generations of leaders and spiritual directors/companions over the last almost 30 years of this organization’s existence.

SDI needs you as we seek to transform into an increasingly welcoming community, one centered around “Audacious Hospitality,” in the words of one of our attendees.

With much gratitude to all of you.

Anil Singh-Molares

Listen

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We WELCOME your feedback on any aspect of this issue of LISTEN, or on SDI as a whole. Please send your comments to
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WRONGDOING and RIGHTDOING,
there is a **FIELD.**

I’ll meet you there.” -Rumi

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Applications for consideration in the 2019-2020 cohort will be available online by April 1, 2018.

All applications for the 2019-2020 cohort must be submitted (including letters of reference) by August 1, 2018.



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Field Notes

SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS INTERNATIONAL MEMBERS RESPOND:

In response to the “Spiritual Direction and Death?” article from our previous issue, we received the following comments:

“Beautiful Anil. What a journey you took with Ricardo.”
— Kristin H ★

“Beautiful indeed, thank you for sharing. Ricardo was clearly an exceptionally kind and loving soul.”
— Ellen O ★

“Eloquent and insightful thoughts.” — Frederica A ★

“Great and beautiful.” — Michael R ★

“So very perfectly expressed - just lovely!” — Cyndy V ★

“Es sencillamente precioso, gracias por compartirlo.”
— Angela S ★

“This was so beautiful, Anil. Having recently accompanied my own closest friend through her dying & her death, your writing especially touches my heart and lights up my mind. Ricardo sounds (& looks) like a remarkable being. You are both blessed to have had each other as soul brothers.” — Mirabai S ★

“Such a beautiful rendering of a beautiful moment. It is such a great honor to walk with another to the threshold of this life.” — Kate S ★

“Beautiful, thank you for sharing this.” — Deborah R ★

“Anil, I’m moved by Ricardo’s openness in asking you to accompany him, and by your readiness to say yes. This is a lovely piece.” — Anne H ★

“Profound and sensitive expression of this most privileged journey with a dying friend.” — Helen M ★

“Beautiful. Soulful. Just like you. Grateful to be sharing this remarkable journey with you!” — Ted F ★

“Your article was so moving. Thank you for sharing it (and Ricardo) with all of us.” — Wendie L ★

“Thank you for the numinous story and the beauty you have added to the newsletter.” — Paula H ★

“I LOVE the January Listen. The poems, the lay-out, the art. THE LOGO!!!! Mainly though, it is your writing of your friend Ricardo’s living into his dying, and your companioning him, that I love. What a gift he gave us by allowing us so close, and how tenderly, respectfully and profoundly you are the scribe. Thank you, Anil. You are helping SDI grow in depth, truth, complexity and sacredness.” — Jennifer H ★

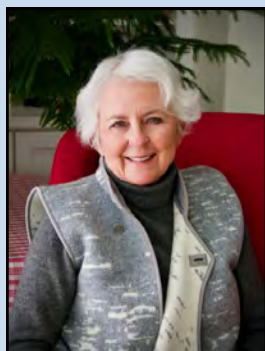
Let us know your thoughts and questions about any aspects of spiritual direction at listen@sdiworld.org.

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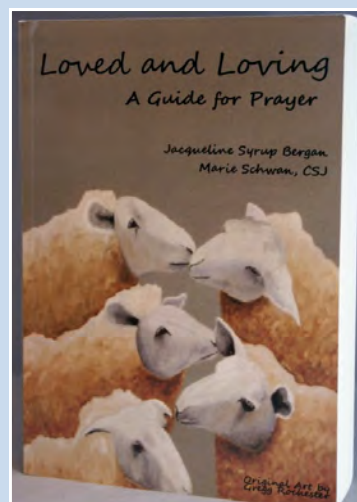
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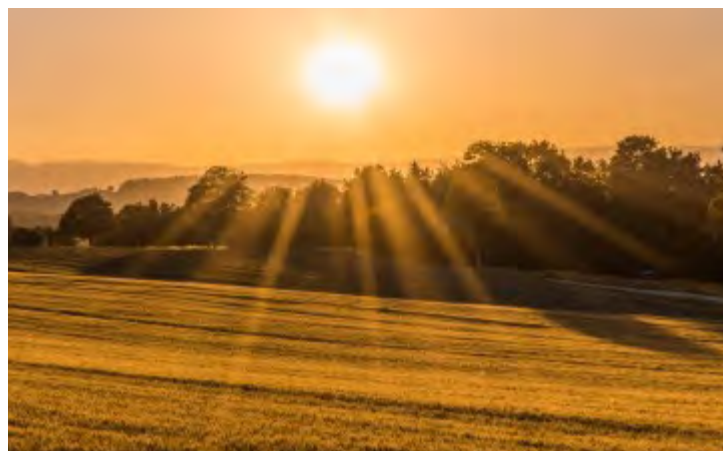
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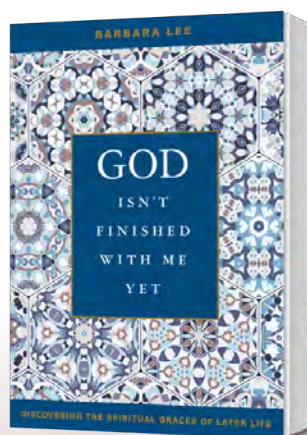
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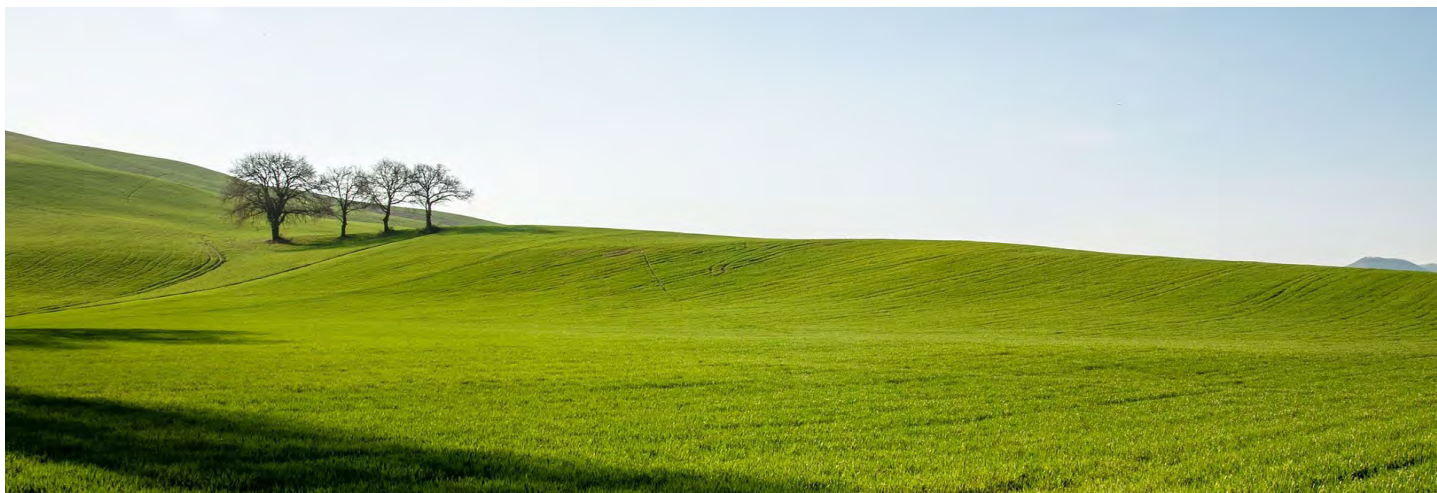
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POEM

MEMORY

Time, being linear, is loss -
 Or spontaneous new -
 Either way never to repeat:
 The loss, the new absolute.

Unless - we make ourselves grannies,
 Embroidering eternity
 With loops of linear time,
 Humming church hymns on a couch,
 Remembering.

By John Krambuhl

John Krambuhl is Director of Mission & Ministry
 at Georgetown Preparatory School in North
 Bethesda, Maryland.

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The significance
which is in
unity
is an eternal
wonder.

- Rabindranath
Tagore

Dr. Charles Burack is an award-winning poet, writer, teacher, and scholar, as well as an interfaith spiritual director, lay chaplain, and creativity coach.



POEM

SPIRIT OF BEAUTY:

A PRAYER

O Spirit of Beauty,
you orchestrate
the symphonies of seasons
and songs of souls,
tuning the eternal rhythms
of heaven and earth.

The trumpeting green of spring
The sunny violins of summer
The mellow cellos of autumn
The deep bassoons of winter.

The harmony of the spheres
The sonatas of the seas
The fugues of the winds
The quartets of the birds.

Blessed is the Spirit of Beauty,
orchestrator of cosmic harmonies.

Old pond,
frog jumps in
- splash

Basho



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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 6,000 spiritual directors are listed by geographical location at www.sdiworld.org.

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