

LISTEN

A RESOURCE FOR SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS & COMPANIONS



JANUARY 2024 VOLUME 18 ISSUE 1

SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES

by Rev. SeiFu Anil Singh-Molares

Regrettably, the likelihood of this year being as bad, and quite possibly worse, as the last one is rather high. The circumstances for 2024 in terms of loneliness, isolation, geopolitics, wars, divisions and acrimony, and dramatic climate changes, among many others, don't look inspiring, to say the least. And of course this has significant consequences for our practice as spiritual directors and companions, both in terms of the considerable challenges it places on those we companion, as well as ourselves.

Given this, how then can we live into making 2024 as good of a year as possible?

We might begin by transposing our views as we turn corners, acknowledging that while it may be a very

hard thing to live with the difficulties we can expect this year, we can start by shifting our perspectives on them. And by doing so, make them easier to process, both for us and others.

"Turning the corner" is what we practice with those we companion, after all, as they literally work to change their minds around the issues they are encountering, with our support. This ranges from impediments that feel significant, but really aren't, to those that feel trivial but reveal themselves to be the ones that need to be dug into. In the former category, our companions might choose to include issues like procrastinating a spiritual practice, which then resolves easily and organically. And in the latter, they might notice a small initial tug within their

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SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES (CONTINUED)

souls that eventually reveals itself to be a substantial unfulfilled longing to connect with God or the Universe in a new, and more profound, way.

Of course, over the last few years, all of us, companions and companioned alike, have also witnessed truly terrible tragedies in our world multiply like weeds in the grass. The kind that inexorably sap our collective energies, and risk conveying us into despair. It's at times like these when it is good to remember that some of the greatest spiritual realizations and awakenings are born in valleys of tears. And that it is in those valleys where we can turn depression and despair into the building blocks for breakthroughs into wisdom and serenity.

As spiritual directors and companions, another thing we can endeavour, especially now, is to redouble our constant efforts to be "someone who people can depend on." So that we might visibly demonstrate our commitment to standing with equanimity in the face of loss and heartbreak, and help illustrate that it is possible to do so. Not with a view to perfection, since such a thing is impossible to attain, and the effort therefore misplaced, but in all of our humanity, including by acknowledging our errors and shortcomings forthrightly and honestly. That is how we can all truly learn to remain grounded even in our unsteadiness!

We should also not forget to tend to ourselves, which is easy to do when responding to a constant flow of emergencies. But lest we become one ourselves, we must resolve to take the space we need for contemplative immersions, and ask for support from one another as peers, as well as from our supervisors, our family, friends, loved ones, and even strangers. This is also means setting healthy boundaries.

Finally, let's lean in to our faith, whatever it might be and however it might express, religious and/or spiritual, with love, kindness, generosity, and understanding. For those we companion, yes, but also for ourselves.

So that new flourishings may emerge from the cracks. And so that we might all see them as openings and entryways to the Infinite, rather than the decay they might appear to be at first.



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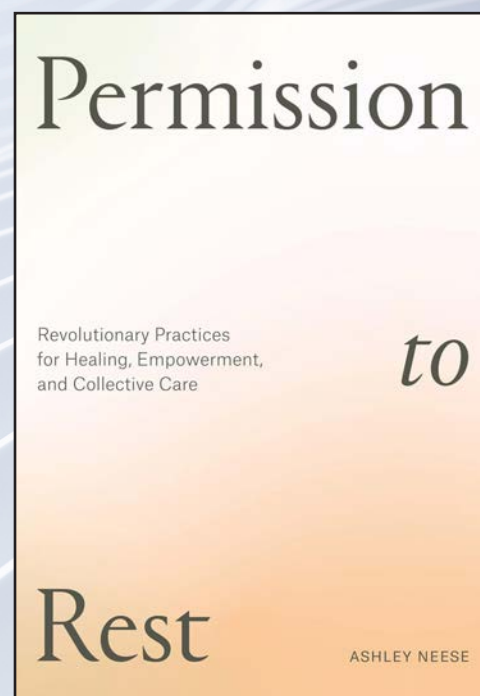
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BOOK REVIEW

Permission to Rest: Revolutionary Practices For Healing, Empowerment, and Collective Care

by Ashley Neese.

Reviewed by Monique CM Keffer



This review originally appeared in Presence Journal, Volume 29, Issue 4, December 2023.

Permission to Rest: Revolutionary Practices for Healing, Empowerment, and Collective Care

BY ASHLEY NEESE
EMERYVILLE, CA:
TEN SPEED PRESS, 2023
208 PAGES
CAD \$26.99
GBP £8.99
USD \$19.99

Current global crises call for immediate attention. Concerned citizens want to spring into action to alleviate feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. Yet in his Nobel Peace Prize speech, the Dalai Lama outlines “problems” plaguing “the human family,” saying there is a necessary step before serving others and the planet. If individuals want to act, they must first embrace inaction. He states that if “we have inner peace, we can be at peace with those around us.” In doing so, we take responsibility for ourselves, “for each other and for the natural environment seriously.” He adds, personal inner strength is gained through religious and non-religious spiritual practices. Running forth to put out the fire of public problems will not be effective before going within. But what are some simple, meaningful steps to reach the serenity inside from which people can provide assistance? To examine questions like these and to teach a multitude of embodied methods to enact inte-

rior healing, author Ashley Neese wrote *Permission to Rest: Revolutionary Practices for Healing, Empowerment, and Collective Care*.

Perhaps best known for her book, *How to Breathe*, Neese’s life work has been sharing somatic therapies for healing trauma, both for herself and others. She teaches breathwork, writes, sees clients privately and publicly, and hosts the podcast, *The Deeper Call*.

Permission to Rest is the book Neese herself “was yearning for” when beginning her own journey—“a pragmatic toolkit” of practices embracing the concept and implementation of rest (15). Though created to be a companion to *How to Breathe*, it can also be a stand-alone text. It features her own experience, the experience of others, research, and informed embodiment procedures. Each of seven sections consider the topic, a meditative method, and reflection phrase. The end features a group guide and lists the practices with page numbers. Though the message is revolutionary, Neese writes gently and lovingly in her beautifully presented book, engaging people in renewing themselves, humanity, and the earth.

Spiritual directors and those in similar roles are needed, more than ever, to walk with people to strengthen themselves by going within. Before companions can answer this call by creating a space for others to slow down and reflect, they must first honor the necessity of sitting with themselves. Both reading *Permission to Rest* and employing its wealth of practices make the goal of resting for renewal achievable. Then both seeker and companion have a greater capacity for effecting change.

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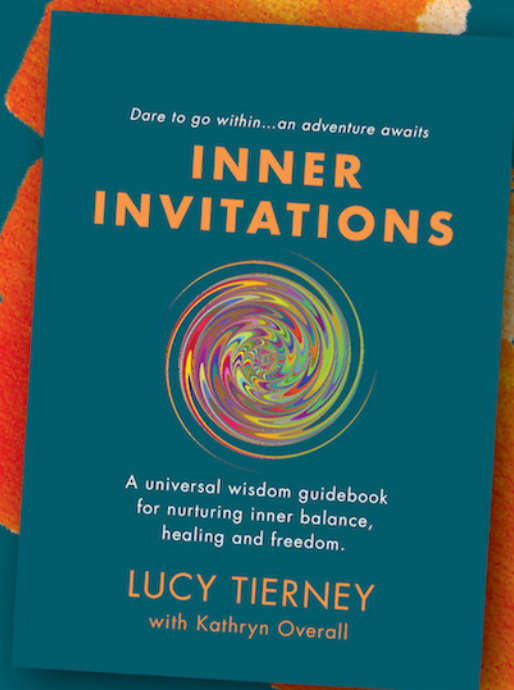
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A photograph of two women sitting and talking. The woman on the left is wearing a black hijab and a black top, gesturing with her hands. The woman on the right has blonde hair and is wearing a white sweater, also gesturing with her hands. They are both looking at each other and appear to be in a friendly conversation.

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A READING FROM THE BOOK OF WISDOM

*"Like gold in the furnace he tried them,
And like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them."
-Wisdom 3:6*

When you grow up in a house divided
There are two Bibles—Catholic and Protestant
Like Northern Ireland
On the westside of Youngstown, Ohio

When my beloved grandmother left the body,
The family asked me to read at her funeral
"Give me the second, the New Testament"
We agree on that one.

On that morning, the priest assigned me the first.
Sight reading was the easy part, yet
My body shuddered as I approached the ambo
And there it was—a reading from the book of Wisdom

Instead of celebrating her—I froze
"Dad's not going to like this"
"I'll be in big trouble"
That's not in his Bible

I was used to doing many things in freeze by then
So I carried on
Passing off my panic as grief
Another moment in my dissociated life

The Book of Wisdom urges us
To seek righteousness
And love that place where
Knowledge meets experience

No wonder we're so afraid of it
And go to war over it
And slaughter the spirits of innocent children
Leaving a host of holy wounds in need of tending

May I spend the rest of my life
Declaring treasures from the Book of Wisdom—
All the books of wisdom—
With the fullness of my voice I lost that day

The voice found me—I am no longer a scared little girl
Afraid of getting in trouble
I am a woman with a heart on fire
And a thirst for knowledge that can never be quenched

May my fiery heart, my thirsty soul
My questioning mind and my listening body
Lead me on the path of wisdom
Unifying me with divine love

Dr. Jamie Marich travels internationally speaking on topics related to EMDR, trauma, addiction, expressive arts, mindfulness and yoga while maintaining a private practice in Ohio. She is an author of seven books on trauma recovery, and spiritual abuse is an area of specialty. For more, go to: <http://www.jamieamarich.com>



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Wrightsville. Wind blustery at thirty knots.
On the horizon leviathan thunderheads advance,
promise a deluge too soon for comfort.

Wind surfers zigzag between Crystal Pier
and Wier Rock Jetty, their crescent sails
like painted sickles of aqua, crimson, and lime.
Cleaving through whitecaps, they skirt each other.
One pelican guides inches above waves, black-tipped wings
steering his purpose. From the pier two pigeons scud across,
land, court, bob and rub their bills, brazenly mate by
blankets of curvaceous co-ends. A tattooed guy points,
thumbs up. A couple cuddles like spoons,
oblivious to winds, sails, pigeons.
She coos, he groans as a few feathers
blow over dunes and God knows where.

Thunder. Windsurfers tack to shore—
bathers stream to the street—
a beach umbrella somersaults—
pigeons fly to roost under the pier.
Rain pours graphite sheets, smudging
seagulls, sandpipers,
and one wet-suited surfer
riding a crest seconds
before lightning strikes.

Peter Venable has been writing sacred and secular verse for many decades. He has been published in *Ancient Paths*, *Prairie Messenger*, *Time of Singing*, *American Vendantist*, *The Anglican Theological Review*, *The Christian Century*, *The Merton Seasonal*, and many other publications. His *Jesus Through A Poet's Lens* is an eBook available at petervenable.com.

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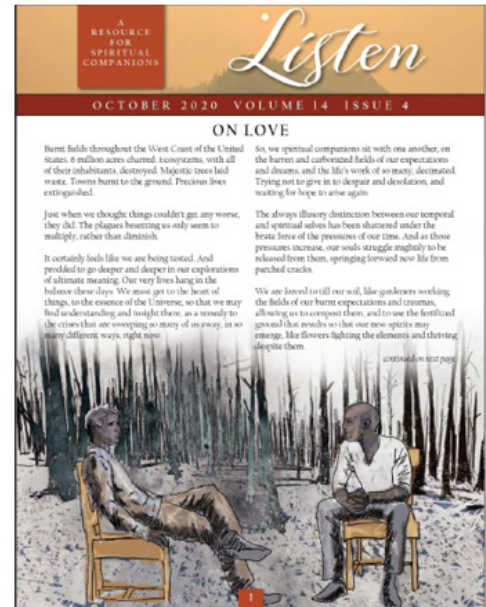
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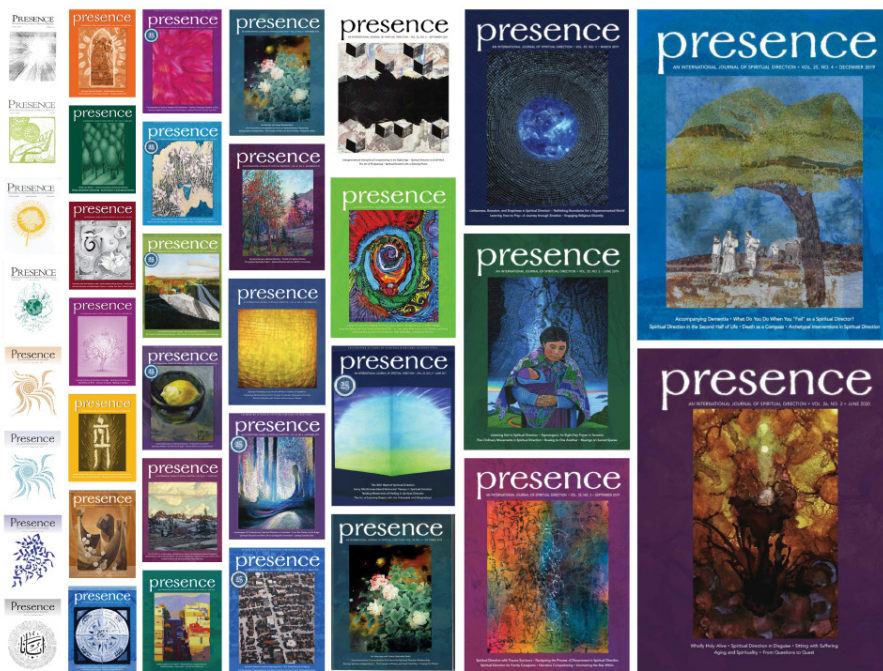
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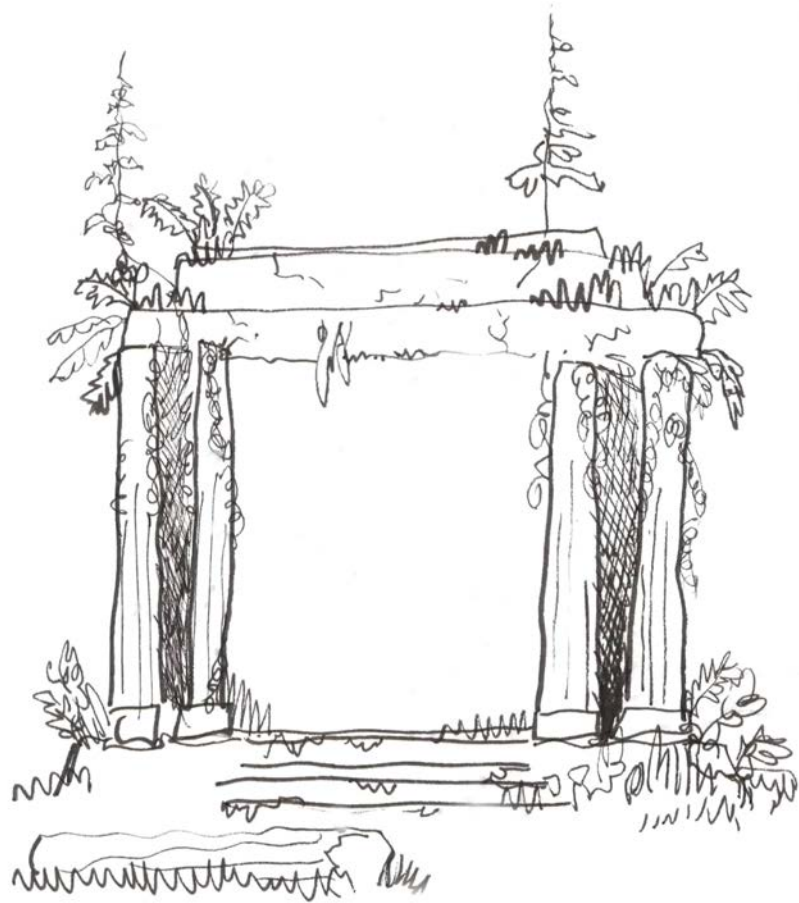
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the Light enters you.”

- Rumi





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