



## Five Principles of Spiritual Direction Training Programs

**F**rom its beginning, Spiritual Directors International has been engaged in conversation about the training of spiritual directors. In 1991, five principles considered important for this work were presented to the group of trainers gathered at the annual symposium in Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania, USA. In the years since then, they have been expanded as ways to keep us answerable to one another. In 2016, a group of spiritual directors with experience in formation gathered to revise these principles with intent to publish them as a set of aims and ideals for the training of spiritual companions. In 2017-2018, a task force was brought together by SDI to bring all this work to fruition—and in addition, to produce its sister document, “A Portrait of a Spiritual Director.” Both documents are published as resources for all those who teach, learn, and practice spiritual direction and to every seeker on the planet.

### Living Document

Spiritual Directors International recognizes that cultural and environmental factors may require these principles to be contextualized for different programs. SDI encourages formation and training programs, religious institutions, health care systems, spirituality centers, supervision circles, peer groups, and individuals to interpret and apply these guidelines in ways appropriate to their curricula, their trainees, their traditions, and their communities. Reflection and review of this document will be ongoing. Suggested revisions are welcome and may be directed to [office@sdiworld.org](mailto:office@sdiworld.org) at any time.

### Spiritual Directors International

Spiritual Directors International is an educational nonprofit. It serves 6,000-plus members from forty-two countries around the world by creating a learning community devoted to the contemplative practice of spiritual direction or companionship. SDI creates guidelines for practice, educates and supports the community but does not accredit or certify individual spiritual directors or companions.

### Terms of Reverence

A spiritual director may identify by many different names: *Director, Companion, Elder, Guide, Teacher, Master, Friend, Anam Cara, Guru, Hashpa’ah, Mashpia, Murshid.*

Spiritual directors or companions may name the deepest of truths in diverse ways. They also honor the names that others revere. Here are some of those terms of reverence: *Universe, God, Lord, Allah, YHWH, Great Spirit, Higher Power, Mystery, Sunyata, Brahman, Tao, Divine, Sacred, Holy, Almighty, Ultimate, the Beyond, Intimate, Abba, Nirvana, Wisdom, Source, Vishnu, Creator, Enlightenment, Interconnection, Holy One, All.*

### Principles Task Force 2018

Spiritual Directors International wishes to express its deep appreciation to the following people who served on the Principles Task Force. This publication is only available to our international community because of their efforts:

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### Core Traditions and Orientations

*Recognizing that there are many spiritual paths and traditions, training programs should be clear about their own approach (religious or not) and open to the backgrounds of all their participants (whether they be theological or nondeity based). Here, we define a “tradition” as an established faith tradition or religion. An “orientation” is a set of spiritual practices or beliefs which may be traditional, nontraditional, interfaith, or interspiritual.*

We value both the spiritual approach of our particular program and the diversity of experience, practice, and traditions amongst our trainees. This is how we do it:



- ❖ We clearly articulate our spiritual tradition or orientation in both our written and verbal exchanges with inquiring students.
- ❖ We are faithful to our own tradition or orientation but flexible enough to respect and welcome other spiritual traditions and orientations.
- ❖ We recognize that our program's tradition or orientation will inform culture and pedagogy.
- ❖ We encourage participants to examine their own spiritual traditions or orientations and invite them to examine and evaluate their beliefs within a supportive environment. We also invite them to deepen their own practices within the wisdom of their own traditions or orientations.
- ❖ We provide a model of spiritual growth within the curriculum as well as encouragement and opportunity for participants to explore and engage with tenets of their own traditions or orientations.
- ❖ *(For interfaith and interspiritual programs)* We are clear about our core spiritual orientation(s) and have a defined method of learning and spiritual direction or companionship that is applicable to many traditions or orientations.

## Discernment

*Discernment has been defined as nonjudgmental perception with a view to obtaining spiritual guidance and understanding. It has also been defined as listening deeply to our own hearts. All training programs should be aware that though discernment is integral to learning how to be a spiritual companion, its practice is subjective and experiential and therefore cannot be precisely defined.*

When we sit gently in the present moment, seeking to be open to the invitation and gifts of what is transcendent in life, we engage in the process of discernment. This activity enables us to know ourselves and our preciousness in a deep way. The process opens us to a profound spiritual relationship with that which is both within us and beyond us. This spiritual guidance or connection may then move us to right action in service of humanity and all life. Discernment assists us in having an ever-deepening and expanding awareness of ourselves, others, the universe, and the deepest of truths, which goes by many names, and no name at all. This leads us to greater congruence between our actions and values.

We teach the process and value of discernment in our training programs so that participants may:

- ❖ Learn to distinguish and act upon our deepest and most transcendent connections in all the circumstances of life.
- ❖ Understand that discernment is not just a personal activity but influences all the arenas and spheres of action in the world in which we operate.
- ❖ Develop the ability to be with others as they enter a discernment process.
- ❖ Recognize that experiencing transcendent connection and wisdom is unique to each person.
- ❖ Develop a sensitivity to the individual ways each person discovers and embraces spiritual guidance both from within and beyond.
- ❖ Engage in their own processes of discernment to determine suitability for the calling of spiritual direction or companionship at this time in their lives.
- ❖ Appreciate that discernment is more than an activity of the intellect but involves the entire person—mind, body, emotion, soul, and spirit.

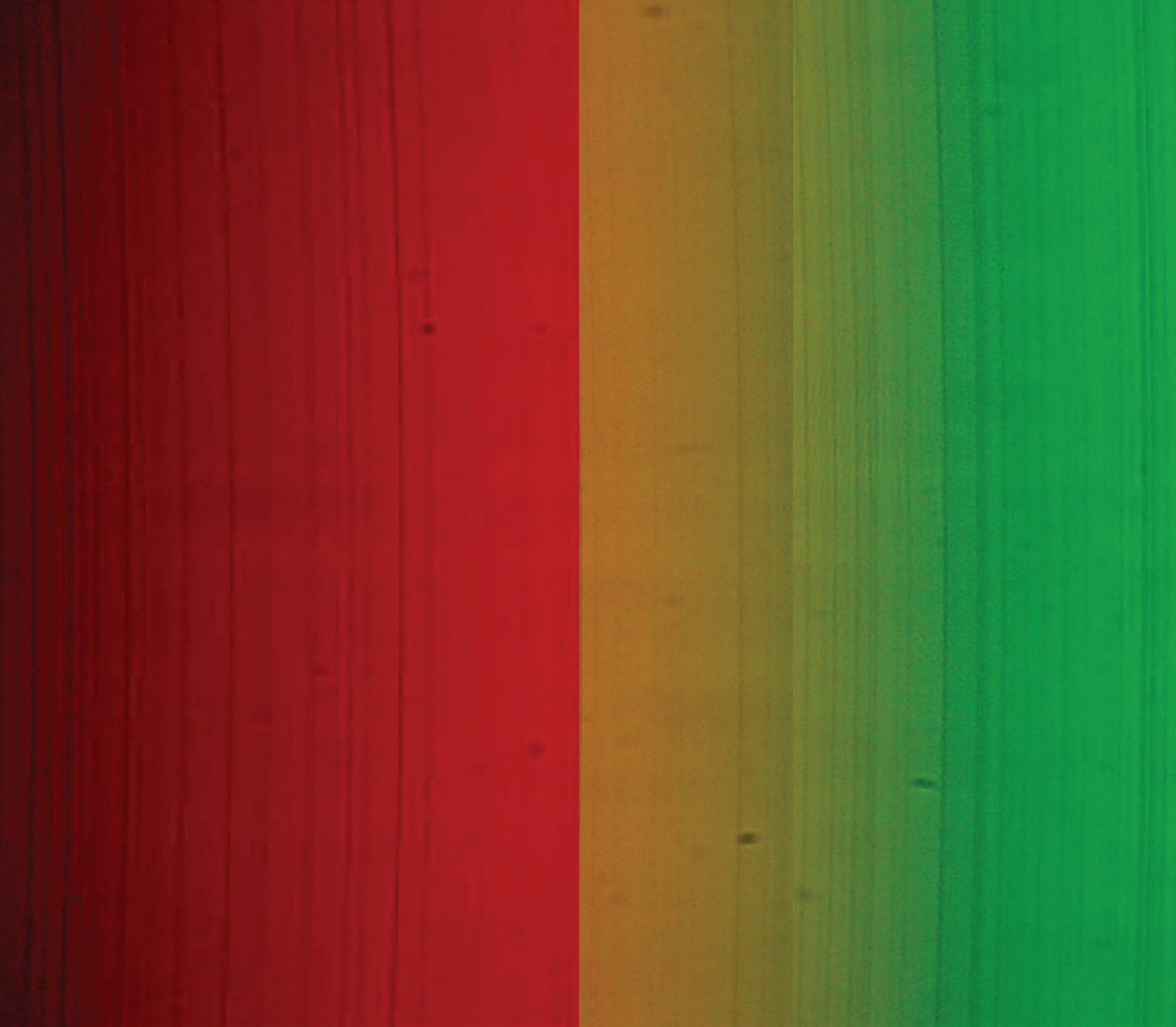
## Psychological-Social-Cultural Dimensions

*Humans are multidimensional beings. Training programs should acknowledge the psychological, sociological, and cultural factors—or lenses—that shape our understanding of spiritual traditions and orientations as well as the experience of our spirituality.*

As we become more aware of both conscious and unconscious influences, we have greater freedom to hear and respond to the movement of spirit—in our lives and in our work. We commit to doing our own inner work and addressing personal issues as they arise, with the intention of being both clear and compassionate in our perception, interpretation, and expression.

We bring awareness to psycho-social-cultural factors in our training programs by:

- ❖ Opening spaces for education, dialogue, and personal exploration around background factors, so as to see these in the context of the spiritual journey. These factors include culture, race, class, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, ability, educa-



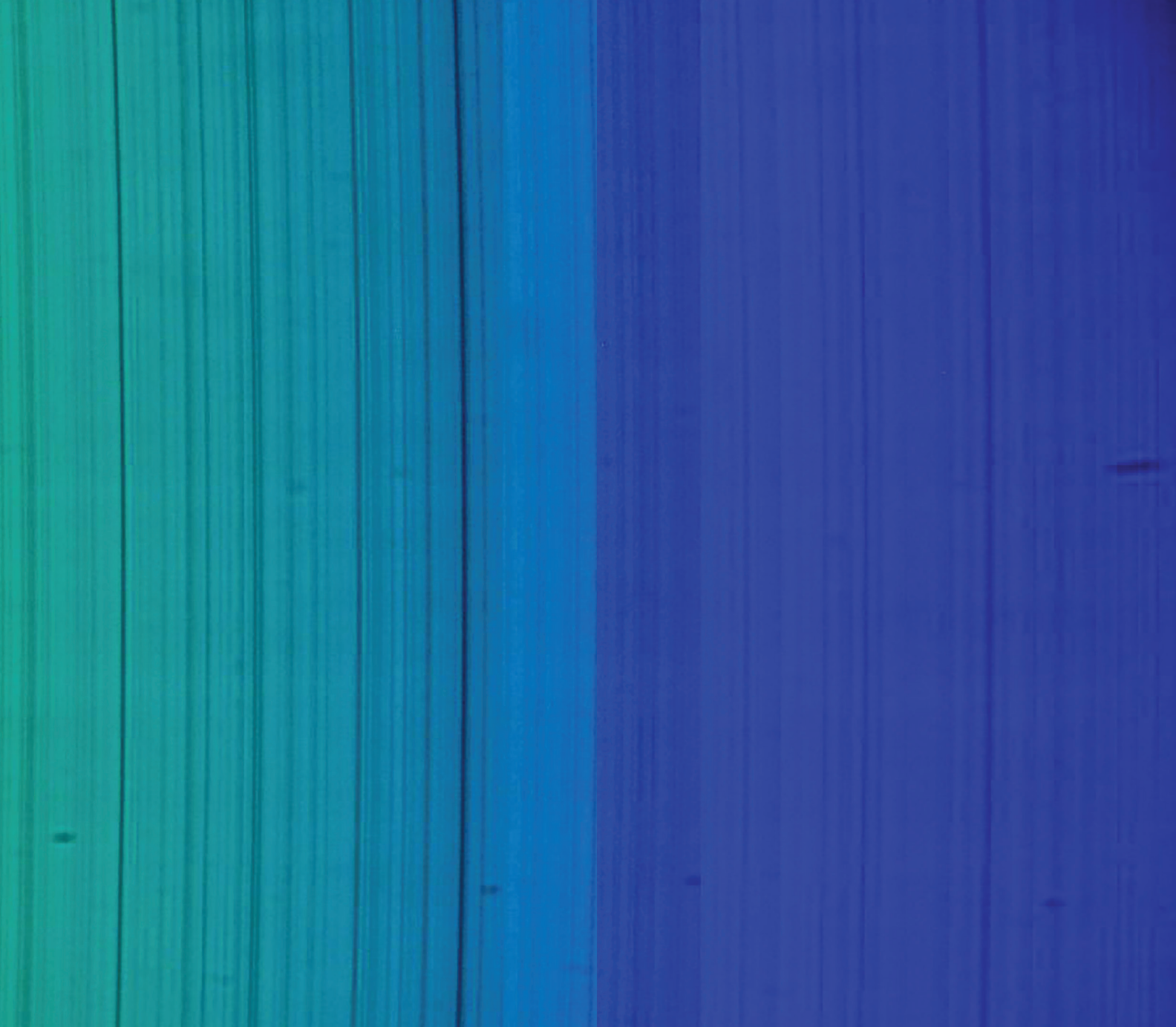
tion, ancestry, family constellations, history of trauma, and others.

- ❖ Identifying the primary model of human psycho-spiritual development that informs the program, making this choice explicit to participants and opening a space for dialogue around this. We also provide basic training in this model.
- ❖ Recognizing the intimate connections between spirit, soul, psyche, body, and mind, and acknowledging spiritual development as a holistic and integrative process. At the same time, we distinguish between spiritual direction or companionship and

therapy and communicate this distinction effectively to participants.

- ❖ Introducing the relevant psychological concepts, considerations, and tools that will serve directors or companions in their work. These include boundaries, projection, transference, addiction, referral, reporting abuse, effective ways to process emotions that arise, and others. We will explore these as they arise in practice.
- ❖ Recognizing that our program delivery is a living demonstration. Program staff are adept and prepared for psycho-spiritual crisis in participants





during the program and maintain clear boundaries throughout with participants, directees, and others. (For example, participants should not be supervised by their spiritual directors or companions.)

### **Practicum/Internship**

*Learning happens when knowledge and experience interact in actual life experiences. A practicum provides the forum for this to happen. In the practicum, participants learn by offering spiritual direction or companionship sessions to directees. Experienced spiritual directors or companions—or*

*trained supervisors—observe the sessions or recordings and offer immediate feedback. This confidential relationship focuses on the student's growth and discernment as a spiritual director or companion.*

We provide practicum experiences in our training program, where the following standards are observed:

- ❖ Trainees engage in actual spiritual direction or companionship sessions where they can receive concrete feedback on their sessions, leading to self-reflection, greater self-knowledge, and skill development.

- ❖ The practicum/intern process deals with what transpires in these sessions and relies on some method of capturing the event. These methods include triads where a supervisor observes the session; written verbatim records; and audio or video recording.
- ❖ Supervision within a practicum assures the quality of spiritual direction or companionship provided by the training program.
- ❖ Individuals who supervise practicum sessions are trained and experienced spiritual directors or companions themselves and are faithful to their own responsibilities within the discipline. Preferably, such persons are also trained in the art of supervision for spiritual directors or companions.
- ❖ We recognize that there are issues of confidentiality within any spiritual direction or companionship conversation; therefore, everyone engaged within a practicum session will be clearly informed as to who will have access to the material that is shared within sessions and how it will be used.
- ❖ Frequently, the supervisor of a practicum will be asked to provide an evaluation or assessment of the trainee at the end of the practicum period. The trainee should be made aware of this when the practicum begins. The trainee should also be aware of how the evaluation will be used or shared in the future.
- ❖ The issues of confidentiality and assessment may both be addressed by creating a covenant agreement for program participants.
- ❖ Practicum programs must last long enough that a trainee develops a good understanding of the process and scope of the practice of spiritual direction or companionship. This usually means at least nine months of supervised work and can be up to two years.

## Supervision

*Supervision is an essential practice for those who engage in spiritual direction or companionship. It is an integral part of a training program, not just within the practicum program, but as part of the development of those training in the discipline. Just as trainees should be engaged in their own personal spiritual direction or companionship, so too should*

*they be engaged in supervision sessions as part of the program.*

We teach supervision because it sustains and develops the individual spiritual director or companion as well as supporting the vocation of spiritual direction or companionship as a whole. It also maintains and evolves standards of care:

- ❖ The focus of supervision is the development of the trainee as a spiritual director or companion. Supervision should include inviting directors or companions to reflect on what they did within the session, why they did it, what they have learned about themselves, and what they have learned about the practice of spiritual direction or companionship.
- ❖ Supervision provides an incentive for growth for participants, providing necessary space and a formal process. Supervision also provides an opportunity to discern a call to suitability for spiritual direction.
- ❖ Learning the process of supervision helps trainees value it as integral part of their practice and their professional development. Trainees will learn to recognize the difference between spiritual direction and supervision.
- ❖ When participants begin to work with directees who are not part of their training program, supervision is an essential element to assure the quality of spiritual direction or companionship, to protect the directee, and to help the trainee grow as a director.
- ❖ When evaluation of a trainee's performance is part of supervision, we offer clear criteria for how a trainee will be evaluated.
- ❖ Supervisors are aware of the tradition, focus, and approach of the training programs they serve.
- ❖ Those who supervise in training programs are themselves in regular supervision. ■