

**Embodied Learning in Spiritual Direction Formation & Training Programs**  
**Spiritual Directors International**  
**Karen L. Erlichman, DMin, LCSW**  
**Wednesday, April 23, 2025**  
**11:00 – 12:15**

For the past few decades, mainstream Western formation and training programs have offered a contemplative dialogic model of spiritual direction, sidestepping somatic practices as a mode of learning, discerning and connecting with the Divine. Many cultural and spiritual traditions are grounded in somatic wisdom that is integral to spiritual companionship with individuals, groups and communities.

With greater awareness of the importance of trauma-attuned ministry, we have an ethical obligation to integrate somatic awareness, tools, rituals, prayers and practices into our formation and training programs. In this experiential session we will explore an overview of somatics and spiritual direction, including specific practices, perspectives and resources from a variety of sources.

***Learning Objectives:***

1. *Discover and/or connect with embodied tenets of your own spiritual tradition*
2. *Identify specific somatic language, skills, tools and practices, and apply them to your teaching, leadership and mentorship of spiritual direction, trainees, and students*
3. *Explore your curiosity and creativity about embodied formation and learning*
4. *Connect to a practice community of peers*

**11:00          Welcome**

**11:10          Introduction and overview of session**

**11:15          Grounding/orienting practice**  
Introduce yourself in the chat with name, pronouns & geographic location.

**11:20          Somatic Introductions**

**11:25          Terminology**

Trauma-Informed Practice

*“Trauma informed practice refers to an approach and its practices that help us when working with the full complexity of people’s experiences within a specific context... Trauma informed practice helps us to understand that everyone has some lived experience with trauma, and while some people may have resolved or integrated the experience, others are still living with the trauma or may not even know it exists. When we build a trustworthy container for our mentor relationship, our experiences, good, indifferent, and difficult, may rise to the surface as a surprise.” – Brian Braganza*

## **EMBODIED AND SOMATIC**

***Definition of somatic (from dictionary.com)***

**of the body; bodily; physical.**

Somatic intelligence: “the body's ability to perceive, interpret, and respond to internal and external stimuli at a deeper, more intuitive level than cognitive intelligence. It involves the autonomic nervous system and body awareness, influencing our feelings, behaviors, and interactions.”

***Definition of embodied (from dictionary.com)***

- 1. expressed, personified, or exemplified in concrete form:**
- 2. having or provided with a body; incarnate or corporeal:**
- 3. *Environmental Science.* relating to or being the energy involved or required in the production, maintenance, or use of a particular concrete object, and therefore *thought of as part of the object:* (emphasis mine)**
- 4. (of writing) portraying the details of bodily experience as they are lived or relived by the writer so as to evoke them sympathetically.**

**11:35          Embodied Spiritual Direction Training**

**11:45          Somatic Discernment Practice**

Dyads in breakout rooms.

***Reflection questions for the dyads:***

- What did you notice in yourself in doing this practice?
- How is this related to teaching students the tools and skills of guiding a seeker in a discernment process using somatic practices?

**12:00          Implications for Formation & Training Programs & Supervision**

**Some questions for your program:**

What are the hopes, intentions and concrete learning objectives of your SD training program?

What does a somatic based pedagogy look like that is part of the foundation of your program?

What somatic resources, teachers, supervisors, mentors, or advisors might be needed?

What needs to be integrated into your curriculum?

**12:10 – 12:15          Q&A/Closing**

## A partial list of readings and resources:

Adesanya, Ineda P. (2014). Becoming a contemplative sistah: Finding weird joy in spiritual freedom. In Bryant-Johnson, Sherry, Norman-McNaney, Rosalie, and Taylor-Stinson, Therese (2014). *Embodied Spirits: Stories of Spiritual Directors of Color*. Morehouse Publishing; New York, NY. 73.

Bangert, Kathi and Colletti, Joseph. *Body as Bridge: Biospiritual Focusing webinar for Spiritual Directors International*. <https://www.sdicompanions.org/product/body-as-bridge-biospiritual-focusing-recorded-webinar/>

Belser, Julia Watts, (2023). *Loving Our Own Bones: Disability Wisdom and the Spiritual Subversiveness of Knowing Ourselves Whole*. Beacon Press; Boston, MA.

God on Wheels: Disability and Jewish Feminist Theology. *Tikkun*, October 20, 2014. Retrieved from <https://www.tikkun.org/god-on-wheels/>

Braganza, Brian (2025). *Trauma-Informed Practice: A CCR Approach to Mentoring*. Personal communication; shared with permission.

Butte, Celine, Colbert, Tasha (2022). *Embodied Approaches to Supervision: The Listening Body*. Routledge; London, UK.

Klotz, Myriam (2006). "From My Flesh I See God: Embodiment and Jewish Spiritual Direction." In Addison, Howard Avruhm and Breitman, Barbara Eve (2006). *Jewish Spiritual Direction: An Innovative Guide from Traditional and Contemporary Sources*. Jewish Lights Publishing; Woodstock, NY.

"Finding God Through the Body." Retrieved from <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/finding-god-through-the-body/>

Leavitt, Julie, (2006). "God Danced the Day You Were Born: Jewish Spiritual Direction and the Sacred Body." In Addison, Howard Avruhm and Breitman, Barbara Eve (2006). *Jewish Spiritual Direction: An Innovative Guide from Traditional and Contemporary Sources*. Jewish Lights Publishing; Woodstock, NY p. 287-293.

Lee, Cindy (2022). *Our Unforming: De-Westernizing Spiritual Formation*. Fortress Press; Minneapolis, MN.

Menakem, Resmaa (2017). *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*. Central Recovery Press; Las Vegas, NV.

Shepherd, Philip. Retrieved from <https://embodiedpresent.com/pages/what-is-embodiment>

(NOTE: This short resource list does not include articles from Presence.)