

Listen

A Seeker's Resource for Spiritual Direction

J A N U A R Y 2 0 1 1

V O L 5 : I S S U E 1

CULTIVATING COMPASSION

I sit facing my computer screen, inches from a large window. My heart thunks. Outside a shadow moves. A moose peers at me. Vividly tall, she is furry, sturdy, six feet away, eyes glued in stillness. Her nose twitches. I catch my breath, meet her gaze. Seconds pass. Does she comprehend glass? Does it matter? When her shoulder muscles flick, she turns away, hooves crunching tracks through the snow crust. I remain, untangled. My breath is slow and deep.

How can we cultivate compassion when the world we inhabit may be hostile, stressful, aggressive, and painful? It is simple, but not easy, and requires our ongoing commitment. Compassion is not reliant upon ease of circumstance. Some of the most trustworthy, compassionate people I know have suffered profoundly. Paula D'Arcy writes, "How you approach something determines what you will see." Roshi Joan Halifax tells us, "The world is so tangled, and I need to be somewhat untangled to meet it." These are good insights. We cannot give what we do not have. What we cultivate is shared with others.

To cultivate compassion we must first show up and be available to place, time, and our embodied self. This prepares us to meet someone or something with integrity and presence. We each live a sacred story with particularities and peculiarities unique to our



Ferruginous Hawk—*Buteo Regalis*

personality, life experiences, and our decisions of yes, no, and maybe.

Three moose wander in my yard—it is their natural habitat. The two twins were birthed when sun shone for twenty hours a day. Lush green ferns and foliage sheltered their tentative beginnings. Months later, I now sit in silence. Two feet of snow arrived, and neighbors help one another in time of need. I do not live in a wildlife preserve or zoo. Bear tracks across my driveway startle me from complacency. While outdoors, I am calmly alert, with a choice to engage the realness of time and place. I am interwoven in this landscape, a part of it. How will I forge connection and compassion in this climate?

Do you understand my question? Perhaps it needs translation: Where do you live—what is your natural habitat? Who do you encounter with your everyday activity? What causes you to stop in awe and wonder? Where

do you rub up against fear and disconnect? These are essential questions in the marketplace or monastery, the inner city, suburbia, or wilderness. Thomas Merton said, "The deepest level of communication is not communication but communion. It is wordless."

What can your natural habitat teach you? A spiritual director can accompany you when you share

your stories of desire, surprise, fear, hope, and despair. Rabbi Awraham Soetendorp reminds us, "The teaching of compassion, the exercise of the soul, will open the heart. And then nothing will be impossible." How will you cultivate compassion through the concrete specifics of your life? 🦉

—Pegge Bernecker

SEEDS OF INTEREST:

- 🦉 Field Guide: *Learning Bird Language—A Pathway to a Contemplative Life*
- 🦉 Field Notes: *Be Still*
- 🦉 Poetry: *How to Meditate*
- 🦉 Global Resources
- 🦉 Book Review: *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence*
- 🦉 Ask Owl



LEARNING BIRD LANGUAGE— A PATHWAY TO A CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE

“Contemplative living is living in true relationship with oneself, God, others and nature, free of the illusions of separateness.”

– Thomas Merton

It is easy to think of contemplation as something people do in a monastery or learn in their later years. But for indigenous people throughout the world, and especially for the ancient scout, a contemplative heart was acquired as part of learning survival. Those of us who seek to live a contemplative life can learn a great deal from indigenous cultures whose very way of being in the world cultivates contemplation and interiority.

It was the job of the ancient scouts to travel many miles ahead of the people so that they could discern danger and find suitable living situations for the group. The survival of all depended on the scouts’ alertness and attentiveness to their environment. Because the ancient scouts were so attuned to the earth and its creatures they could read the language of the birds just as we learn to read road signs. It was the language of the birds that could, and still can, be discerned by the five universal messages they all convey. Most significantly, the scout could decipher the bird’s alarm call as distinct from their other four calls. This understanding guided and protected the scout.

From the youngest ages, the elders trained their children to listen. They learned to listen to the birds, the wind,

and most of all to the silence. They were trained to be at home in the silence as it is a doorway to the Great Silence or to the *Spirit-that-moves-through-all-things*. Even when they played with other children, there was a great deal of shared silence and attentiveness to the environment that surrounded them. This stands in sharp contrast to the frequency with which modern youth fill up natural spaces with boom boxes that exude loud hyper music.

Jon Young is a contemporary expert on nature awareness and the language of the birds. His expertise comes from elders of indigenous tribes as well as from the birds themselves. He would say there is nothing spiritual or religious about the information he teaches as it simply reflects a way of life. I would suggest that the entire life of the indigenous people was a contemplative one. In order to understand his teachings and to understand the significance of bird language, it is necessary to understand what Young and others call *Jungle Law*. This law pertains to nature in general and the rules are the same whether one is in Africa, Asia, or North, Central, or South America. We are all interconnected, not only at the level of matter, but also at the level of perception and communication.

...For the full story, go online to <http://bit.ly/ListenFieldGuide>

—Nancy Cannon is an artist and a spiritual director who lives with her husband on eight wooded acres in Michigan, USA. Their land provides daily creature encounters as well as endless inspiration for her art. She can be reached at nancycannon@allearthtiles.com.



Listen

Publisher: Spiritual Directors International
Executive Director: Liz Budd Ellmann, MDiv
Editor: Pegge Bernecker
Production Supervisor: Tobias Becker
Submissions: listen@sdiworld.org
Advertising: www.sdiworld.org

Listen is published four times a year (January, April, July, October). The names **Spiritual Directors International™**, **SDIWorld™**, and **SDI™** and its logo are trademarks of Spiritual Directors International, Inc., all rights reserved. Opinions and programs represented in this publication are of the authors and advertisers and may not represent the opinions of Spiritual Directors International, the Coordinating Council, or the editors.

WWW.SDIWORLD.ORG

Listen is an outreach publication of Spiritual Directors International. When you visit the Spiritual Directors International 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: A Worldwide Resource Guide of Available Spiritual Directors*. More than 6,000 spiritual directors are listed by geographical location at www.sdiworld.org.

FIELD NOTES

BE STILL

Prayer and contemplative practice shift throughout our lifetime. What once was life-giving can become a desert or wasteland when we grow and life circumstances change. At other times, a former spiritual practice can be remembered and renewed. I recently welcomed my old friend, Psalm 46:10a, and embrace its familiar simplicity. In particular, I appreciate how simple it is to pray this way, wherever I find myself. If I am experiencing stress, I am immediately calmed, and available to be present to myself and current situation. When I feel thankful, this easy, contemplative practice deepens my gratefulness and compassion.

Please join me, wherever you are. Find a dignified, comfortable position, and slowly repeat each phrase. Pause between each line for however long you desire. Simply rest and *be*. When thoughts flit in your mind

or sensations move in your body, do not be concerned. Simply notice, and let go. When your time is complete—it could be seconds, minutes, or hours—take a deep breath, then offer a silent thank you for your being, your breath, your life.

PSALM 46:10A

Be still, and know that I am God.

...

Be still and know that I am.

...

Be still and know.

...

Be still.

...

Be ♣

SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL EVENTS

April 28 - May 2, 2011

Cultivating Compassion

Featuring Keynote Presenter | **Dr. Janet Ruffing, RSM**



Professor in the Practice of Spirituality and Ministerial Leadership at Yale Divinity School, Connecticut, USA, and author of *Uncovering Stories of Faith: Spiritual Direction and Narrative*; *Mysticism and Social Transformation* (ed); *Spiritual Direction: Beyond the Beginnings*; *Elisabeth Leseur: Selected Writings*; *To Tell the Sacred Tale: Spiritual Direction and Narrative*.

A professor of spirituality and spiritual direction at Fordham University in New York from 1986 to 2010, she lectures and offers workshops throughout the world.

with Spiritual Director | **Wilkie Au, MDiv, PhD**



Award-winning author of *By Way of the Heart: Toward a Holistic Christian Spirituality*; *Enduring Heart: Spirituality for the Long Haul*; and co-author of *Urgings of the Heart: A Spirituality of Integration*; *The Discerning Heart: Exploring the Christian Path*, he is a professor of theological studies at Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles, California, USA.



Full details and registration online at www.sdiworld.org

Spiritual Directors International is a global learning community of people from many faiths and nations who share a commitment to the art of contemplative spiritual care and compassionate listening.

Everyone who wants to cultivate compassion is welcome.

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How to Meditate

Thinking of lizards

The dusty ones, the color of earth

Aware of emptiness

They see with bulging eyes

And move quickly into stillness

— Rev. Laura West, Ukiah, California, USA

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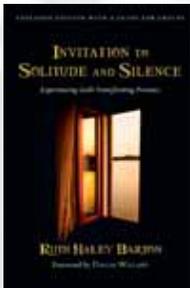
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REVIEW



**Invitation to Solitude and Silence:
Experiencing God's Transforming Presence
by Ruth Haley Barton**

Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010
165 pages, USD\$18.00

Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence offers sound teaching, vulnerable life stories, and wise guidance for individuals and groups who seek God through the disciplines of silence and solitude. Writing from her evangelical Christian roots, Ruth Haley Barton offers insight into the profound path of contemplative prayer and intimacy with God.

Her journey into the deliberate practice of silence and solitude begins when her new spiritual director says, "Ruth, you are like a jar of river water all shaken up. What you need is to sit still long enough that the sediment can settle and the water can become clear" (29). Barton says, "I couldn't even imagine what it would be like to be still long enough for anything to settle! I couldn't imagine not having an agenda or a prayer list or a study plan" (29). However, out of desperation and an inner emptiness, she said "yes" to sit still.

Barton's accessible language and compelling invitation will refresh seasoned spiritual practitioners, spiritual directors, and everyone beginning a spiritual practice. Topics address the significance of rest, areas of resistance and desire, the experience of emptiness, facing self, resting in pure presence, the value of having someone accompany us, and that most important truth, "If my experiences in solitude and silence don't make a difference in this real-life moment, then I'm not sure any of this is worth much" (130).

Barton writes, "In the midst of the high-performance cultures in which I lived and worked and worshiped, it was embarrassing to acknowledge such a voracious desire for silence and solitude. I was afraid people would question my ability to produce along the lines they were measuring. I was afraid of becoming irrelevant in a world that measures relevance by output and being out front" (127).

A spiritual director and retreat leader, Barton sheds light on the power of the contemplative path. Through her guidance, we encounter the depth of silence, and the ways we sabotage and struggle along the way. With "A Guide for Groups" included, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence* is a valuable resource, particularly for Christians who want to grow deeper with scripture and intimacy with God. ✍

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Are you seeking a spiritual practice?

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e-mail mholdenfsp@aol.com



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Elaine Prevallet, SL, PhD; Detroit, MI, USA
Dominican Center Religious Development
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Monastery of the Risen Christ School for
Spiritual Directors: Abbot David Geraets
Contact Dr. Marie J. DiSciullo-Naples
207-364-7288; joyologist@awi.net

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by Maureen Conroy, March 18 – 20, 2011
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ASK OWL

Question: I've begun meditating on my own for fifteen minutes every day. I read a book that said it is beneficial to sit in silence, and let go of my thoughts. After two months, I'm becoming restless in the quiet. Also, I'm dreaming more at night. I'm recalling memories from my past, and reexamining some of the choices I've made in my life. I wonder if there is something more I should pay attention to. Is this common?



inner exploration where a spiritual guide would be of assistance. A contemplative practice leads us to navigate our inner terrain. You are simply and profoundly integrating parts of yourself; this can be a simultaneous experience of consternation and exhilaration. Healing, forgiveness, life purpose, and vocation all come to light.

Hoot Hoot: Thank you for deciding to include contemplative practice in your everyday life. This is good! Your question is excellent. When we make time to engage inner silence and thus listen more clearly to our own promptings and the world around us, we open to the unknown and unpredictable. We also begin to realize how distracted and fragmented we can be. A sure way to discover that *life is an adventure* is through contemplative practice, prayer, mindfulness, or meditation. You will find your own language to describe your process.

Everyone has a unique path—and your experience is *common!* It sounds as if you are at a place of questioning and

You do not mention if you are a part of a small group, or if you have any companions who have begun this journey with you. A spiritual director or guide can be of value; so too is a friend or group that gathers with contemplative practice as the focus.

To locate a spiritual director near you, go to www.sdiworld.org. Search the free, online, *Seek and Find: A Worldwide Resource Guide of Available Spiritual Directors*, and watch more than twenty-five YouTube videos in the *Spiritual Directors International Learns From...* educational series. Please continue to stay with your process, and be willing to risk an adventure into fullness of life.

—If you have a question for Owl, please e-mail Listen@sdiworld.org.



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Spiritual Directors International publications are printed by a Forest Stewardship Council certified press.



JANUARY 2011 VOL 5: ISSUE 1

“Tending the holy around the world and across traditions ...

Al servicio de lo sacro alrededor del mundo y a través de las tradiciones ...”

—Translated by Marta Rios and Xavier Ortiz Monasterio



Jesuit Center

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2011 Winter and Spring 7- Day Directed Retreats

Jan. 18–26, Feb. 23-March 3, April 5-13,

Thomas Ryan, C.S.P. will present: *PRAY ALL-WAYS* on March 11-13, 2011

Contemplative living keeps our antennae up and receiver station open to the messages always coming in from the Sender. Fr. Ryan will teach us how to hone this resonance through a variety of prayer forms and methods.

Timothy Gallagher, O.M.V. will present: *DISCERNING THE WILL OF GOD:*

An Ignatian Guide to Christian Decision Making on April 15-17, 2011

When faced with choices in life, how can we know which choice God wills? Through experiences taken from real life, Fr. Gallagher will help us to explore St. Ignatius's text on ways of discerning God's will.

Kathryn Fitzgerald, D.Min. and William Sneek, S.J., Ph.D. will present

A DAY FOR SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS:

SOUL SEARCHING: Archetypes Discovered and Befriended on May 9, 2011

As we listen to our directees as well as reflect on our own journeys, our knowledge of archetypes and how they illuminate our stories and influence our behavior can be an invaluable practical resource.

For a complete list of our retreats and workshops please visit our website: www.jesuitcenter.org.