

CELEBRATING MORE THAN 20 YEARS OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS INTERNATIONAL

presence

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION • VOL. 20, NO. 3 • SEPTEMBER 2014



An Interview with Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi • Spiritual Journeying with Trauma Survivors
Guiding the Spiritual but Not Religious • Images of Interfaith Meditation and Spiritual Direction

presence

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

ARTICLES

- We Are Cells of the Living Planet:
An Interview with Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi
Jennifer (Jinks) Hoffmann and Carol Ludwig 6
- Images of Interfaith Meditation and Spiritual Direction
Suzanne Tindall 12
- Spiritual Direction for the Seven Stages
of the Spiritual Journey: Sufism and Teresa of Avila
Cheryl Camp 17
- From Enemy to Friend: The Inner Work of Peacemaking
Amy Eilberg 28
- The Effects of Trauma on a Person's Faith Journey
Rob Culbane 34
- Moving Identity beyond Story:
Spiritual Journeying with Trauma Survivors
Margaret F. Arms 49
- Guiding the Spiritual but Not Religious
Tom Stella 55

FEATURES

- Focus** 3
- Readers Respond** 4
- About Our Authors** 5
- About Our Poets and Artists** 59
- Reviews** 62

POETRY

- Falling
Sarah Rossiter 16
- Silent Worship
Amy Lucinda Runge Gaffney 54
- Why did you think that only whiteness was pure?
Alexandra Martin 58

REFLECTION

- Tripping up in Sister's Shoes
Barbara Hudspith 43



9



26



31



44



Images of Interfaith Meditation and Spiritual Direction

Suzanne Tindall

“To see a world in a grain of sand
And a heaven in a wild flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.” — William Blake

Blake’s words “to see a world in a grain of sand and heaven in a wild flower” remind me of the intense experience of non-duality that meditation can bring. Don’t get me wrong, every morning when I sit to meditate, I do not experience holding infinity in the palm of my hand; sometimes I am only holding a tiny space filled with to-do lists or leftover regrets from the day before. Most days, though, I can manage to hold a space big enough for the presence of God to squeeze in, and then if I am lucky, I remember who am I and why I do this.

Blake’s words speak beautifully to the moment when we can still ourselves and occasionally, albeit rarely, catch a glimpse of eternity in an hour, or perhaps even twenty minutes. Sometimes meditation allows us to glimpse heaven in a wild flower and in the process experience that heaven and the wild flower are also within us. What Blake describes is a mystical experience, an experience of awakening or illumination. These mystical moments are few and far between for most of us. They require grace. We cannot make them happen ourselves, but we may be able to ready ourselves for the experience, or at least for our acceptance of the experience when it happens. spiritual direction can serve as an important map for finding your way in this terrain.

In his book *Growing into God: A Beginner’s Guide to Christian Mysticism*, John Mabry, the spiritual director of the Interfaith Spiritual Direction Program at the Chaplaincy Institute, says the following about mysticism: “It is not about attainment. Instead, true mysticism is about relationship, and genuine relationship always takes time. It is always messy. It also involves mistakes, missteps, pain, causing pain to others, forgiveness, reconciliation, compassion, and rest. This is not a contest. It is

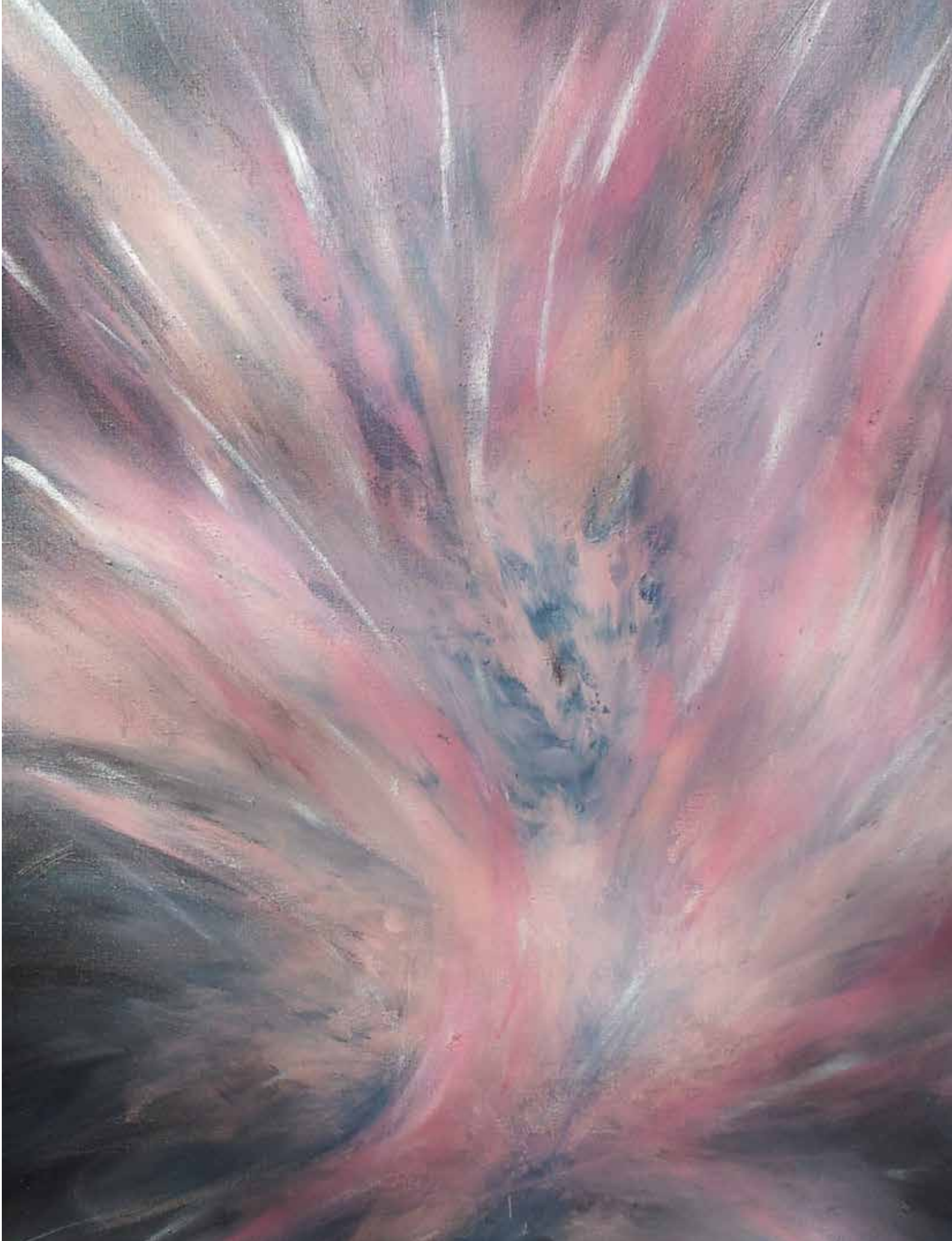
about making a home with God” (11).

If you are Hindu or Buddhist, you might see the mystical experience as the Catholic monk and interspiritual seeker Wayne Teasdale describes it in his book, *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World’s Religions*, when he says, “the deepest center of ourselves is at one with the deepest center of the universe” (53). However you see mysticism, it cannot be argued that it is an easy road. Instead it is a road that involves discipline and, perhaps most clearly, courageous honesty.

At some point during your travels on this road, you may be faced with an experience in meditation that is so overwhelming that it can cause the meditator to run the other direction. At this point, it is important to have someone like a spiritual director, who is familiar with this road, to provide a map of sorts, and a companion along the way doesn’t hurt either. Just this sort of overwhelming experience happened to me when I was a brand-new interim executive spiritual director of the Hesed Community in Oakland, California, USA. I was supposed to be a leader, and yet I found myself wanting to run for the hills.

The experience happened right after Pentecost on a night when we were doing *lectio divina*. At Hesed, we often used *lectio divina* as a starting place for meditation. *Lectio divina* (Latin for divine reading) is a traditional Benedictine practice of scriptural reading and meditation intended to promote connection with God by fully entering into the scripture and experiencing the truths there within one’s own being. On this evening, I sat listening to these words from John: 20:20–22: “After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”

I began to see, in my mind’s eye, flames of pink, orange, and yellow entering the top of my head hovering for a while around my forehead, then dropping down into my heart. At this point, I was filled with so much energy that it became impossible for me to sit still without causing myself physical pain. As I sat through the





longest twenty minutes of my life, I felt first my stomach and then every other muscle in my body respond to the energy by tensing up. As I breathed through the energy, it helped me to stay present but I did not like it. I did not like it one bit.

As I bolted from the chapel after the meditation was finally, mercifully over, I worried about what had just happened. Had this been some sort of divine experience, or was I just losing my mind? Had I touched into something within me that was intent on my destruction or intent on my healing? I didn't know anything except that I was now afraid to sit in meditation.

Mabry describes this type of experience in this way: "Such an experience can utterly undo a person. It can be disorienting, frightening, inspiring and dangerous. In spiritual direction, we call it a Spiritual Emergence, or even a Spiritual Emergency and indeed people often flee to the emergency room, fearing that they are going crazy or are physically ill" (15).

If I had not already had a spiritual director of my own, I might have done the same. But how can a spiritual director help to translate questions and insight from the cushion back into our lives so that we can grow and learn from them? We have to unpack these experiences, and sometimes that takes the eye or ear of a bystander. How often is it that we can't see the forest for the trees in our own lives but can see the entire landscape in someone else's? A well-trained spiritual director can help meditators to see the forest and the trees in their own spiritual lives.

Lauren Van Ham, dean of the Chaplaincy Institute in Berkeley and a spiritual director, has this to say about difficult or insightful moments during meditation and the help that a spiritual director can provide:

When a client¹ wonders if something is significant, a spark of God, we can be curious together about it. We can confirm if the insight is a divine spark, and then we are encouraged to find ways to grow and tend it within us. What we learn in moments of stillness and how that can inform moments of activity can be reflected back to us in ways that allow us to grow. Something profound hap-

1 In the context of spiritual direction, "client" refers to someone seeking spiritual support and guidance, such as a spiritual directee, retreatant, parishioner, congregant, or seeker.

pens in the simple act of stopping. If that stopping can be experienced in the midst of motion we get to remember ourselves and God. (Personal interview)

People often look to meditation, prayer, dreams, and shamanic journeys to provide answers to some of our deepest questions. Although these spiritual practices can provide answers, I have found them more often to provide questions. In the words of Dom Laurence Freeman, OSB, spiritual director of the World Community for Christian Meditation, from his book *Jesus, the Teacher Within*, "Important questions create silence" (24).

An important question takes time to answer; it requires stopping and contemplating. I would venture to say that it takes silence to create important questions as well. When we focus on silence in meditation, these questions sometimes arise, and if we take them to spiritual direction, we can reflect them back and unpack them. Freeman calls these redemptive questions, writing:

They initiate a process of redemption. This means a conscious process of healing and of liberation from all that blocks joy, compassion and creativity... A redemptive question is not like other mundane questions. It does not expect an ordinary, rational, correct answer. Instead it opens up a deeper level for experiencing the truth... The right questions constantly refresh our awareness that life is not fundamentally a secular problem but a sacred mystery. Mysteries are not solved. They are entered upon and they embrace us. (26, 27)

I love this idea of mysteries embracing us. Perhaps this is why I love Blake. What can be more mysterious than a world in a grain of sand, or eternity in an hour? We cannot understand these with our logical minds, but we can enter into them and embrace them with our hearts.

In Zen Buddhism, *koans*, or questions that pose paradoxes upon which to meditate, have been used for centuries. They are meant to train Zen Buddhist monks to move from dependence on logical thinking toward a precipice of completely new understanding that forces them into gaining sudden intuitive enlightenment. Whether they are *koans* or other questions that arise naturally, these thoughts can feed and nurture us with the beauty and experience of living in the unknowable.



For most of us, becoming comfortable with the unknowable takes time and courage. As important as insights can be, a mature spiritual seeker knows that becoming comfortable with the unknown and the process of not knowing are equally necessary. To honor that which is of necessity unknowable to humans and to be comfortable with a divine source that is too big for us to comprehend while allowing it to fill us anyway is a truly courageous path. Jumping into the deep, dark water and finding ourselves in the midst of the unknowable takes a bit of nerve—some might even say foolishness. But as Shakespeare knew, it is often the fool that speaks the truth.

Meditation is a way for the truth that is found in nothingness or in the unknowable to be experienced and embraced. Sometimes this happens gradually, and sometimes it can cause a sudden spiritual upheaval. However, with the help that a spiritual director can provide, meditation is a way to become comfortable with listening in silence and sitting with the silence within yourself until you experience only the real, the divine spark within you that joins you to everything in the universe.

Sister Barbara Hazzard, OSB, founded the Hesed Community in Oakland more than thirty years ago. At the time, the work of John Main, OSB, was beginning to be accepted, but there was still quite a lot of controversy among Catholics who felt that meditation was an Eastern form of mysticism that could be dangerous to Christians. Bede Griffiths, OSB Cam, was transformed by visiting India, where he built an ashram teaching meditation but remained true to his Christian roots. He was deeply committed to the interspiritual relationship of Hinduism and Christianity. Over time, research proved that the desert fathers and mothers of Christianity practiced meditation or contemplative prayer, which gave it a Christian history. As a result, the contemplative practice became more acceptable in the Roman Catholic Church.. That said, when Sister Barbara began the Hesed community, it was an uphill battle within the local church and in her community. Nevertheless, she prevailed and began what she called an urban monastery, a place where people could go amidst their busy lives and be reminded of the importance of living in contemplation and community. She believes that spiritual seekers must find some form of deliberate silence in order to listen for the word of God.

I asked Sister Barbara why she thinks having a spiri-

tual director is important for meditators and those who practice other forms of contemplative prayer. She said that seekers need experience in looking at their lives to observe how God is present in them. Sharing the contemplative journey with a spiritual director helps them to be more aware of the subtle ways in which the Spirit presents itself in our lives. This is what we as spiritual directors attempt to offer. Lastly, Sister Barbara suggested that a spiritual director can be helpful by encouraging one to keep at it when the going gets rough.

Spiritual direction is useful for those who meditate in more alternative ways as well. A few of my spiritual directees and I have used art-as-meditation as a form of language to converse with the divine. I begin with a specific body-centered meditation ending in a prayer and a request for an image, a color and shape, or movement. Although I most often use acrylic paints on canvas, the method can be done with pastels on paper or any other media that is readily available. After the spiritual direction session, the participant has a painting or drawing that is completely personal. Most work is abstract and often takes some time for the spiritual directee to fully digest. Painting is part of the conversation between the participant and the divine and embodies the consciousness of this particular moment in the relationship. The artist-spiritual-directee can go back and continue to absorb insight from the painting indefinitely.

As a spiritual director, when I am using art, I engage only in a process of reflection and mirroring with the spiritual directee. I might say, “I noticed that when you began to use the red over here, you began to smile. Do you remember what you were feeling then?” I would not ever say, “This is too dark; maybe you should add a lighter color.” This practice, like spiritual direction in general, is not directed by the spiritual director, but by the divine.

I have used this spiritual practice in my own life for almost thirty years. It took me several years to realize that God and I were in conversation when I was painting in this particular way and that I was learning something about my own embodiment of the divine with each experience. Teaching a method like mine to spiritual directees proves useful both for individuals who are particularly visual and also for those who are not. I have done this with artists and math professors with little difference. If anything, those who do not consider themselves artists



have an easier time letting go of their thoughts about what colors they should use or whether something looks right and going with their image. There is no judgment about the end result because it is a process, a conversation, an image of one's relationship with the divine in a particular moment; it is not meant for anyone else. These images, however, shared with a spiritual director, can be quite interesting places to explore.

Whether meditation is done by sitting zazen or with centering prayer, chanting, art, or walking, it is an inter-faith experience. Every religion espouses some form of meditative or contemplative practice for drawing closer to a personal, mystical experience of the divine. This is a language that we can all speak, the language of the direct experience of the Source of all being. Sometimes, though, it is nice to have a little help decoding the experience and bringing it back into one's life in a meaningful way. As

spiritual directors we can mean the difference for our spiritual directees between moving deeper into the Mystery or running for the hills. ■

References

- Blake, William. "Auguries of Innocence." In *The Pickering Manuscript*. 1803. Reprint. New York: Pierpont Morgan Library, 1972.
- Freeman, Laurence. *Jesus, the Teacher Within*. New York: Continuum, 2000.
- Mabry, John R. *Growing into God: A Beginner's Guide to Christian Mysticism*. Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 2012.
- Teasdale, Wayne. *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 1999.



Falling

For Anna

It was the cat who caused the latest fall
That took me to the hospital for what
Turned out to be a broken rib; painful,
Yes, though they said nothing could be
Done, and, in the scheme of things, I've
Suffered worse. Besides, not malice but
Affection pressed the cat against my leg
Which makes pain easier to bear as does
The fact that we've grown old together.
Though what, I wonder, does she know of
Age or illness, the one that stalks my body,
Limb by limb, slowly turning each to stone.
Immutable, relentless, mute; yes, even that,
My voice fades too. And so it is I practice
Falling for if I can't stand tall, I want to fall
Straight as a tree. I want to get it right,
You see, so in between falls, I write poems,
And even falling, wear bright clothes—turquoise,
Salmon pink, spring green—clothes that sing,
No, shout with joy.

Sarah Rossiter