



ART OF SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT
REFLECTION ASSIGNMENTS
MONTH FIVE: ENCOUNTER

A. FAITH TRADITION PERSPECTIVE “The Path of Islam and Sufism” CD, Richard Groves

1. Central to Islam is the concept of “Inshallah” (peace/shalom) which teaches that out of surrender to “holy wisdom” or the will of the Holy One, deep peace will result.

Sacred Question: *Describe a time when surrender to the circumstances of life over which you had no control led to deep peace.*

2. “In God there is only forgiveness, and forgiveness, and forgiveness, and forgiveness...” Core teaching from the Sufi Tradition.

Sacred Question: *What does forgiveness mean to you? How does your image of God and/or religion support or contradict this radical concept of compassion?*

3. Muslims use prayer beads in order to recite the “99 names of God.”

Sacred Question: *What would your version of the 99 names of God be? Try making a list of your names for the Holy One.*

4. The concept of “baraka” means blessing in the broadest sense. It implies that my coming into contact with a person or place that is good brings me blessing by its very presence.

Sacred Question: *Have you ever encountered someone whose goodness “rubbed off” on you? Have you ever been in a holy place which did the same? How would you describe this encounter?*

5. In Islam, spiritual guidance is an absolute necessity. One does not become a spiritual person in isolation from the community or one could easily fall into self-deception.

Sacred Question: *Have you ever experienced trusting your own guidance and found yourself being deceived? Have you had positive experiences of “submission” to another through spiritual direction or some other form of guidance?*

B. FOUNDATIONS FOR SPIRITUAL DIRECTION Care of Mind, Care of Spirit, May, c. 5, ‘Encounter’

1. “Psychological defenses may impinge dramatically upon prayer life or ascetical practice. For example, resistances to prayer may be the result of wanting to avoid some psychological feeling or experience that threatens to surface if one becomes quiet and relaxed.” p 90
 - *Can you name a time when your mind may have sabotaged your need for contemplative quiet and retreat? Why?*
 - *What kinds of excuses do you tend to make when falling out of regular spiritual practice?*

2. "Other sources of psychological resistance to spiritual practice can include... rebellion against discipline and authority... such as rebelling against our own internal 'parent' who tells us we should or should not do something OR being disappointed that there is no 'high' or relief in the experience leading us to resist prayer out of anger [i.e. there is nothing in it for me] or a more depressive, 'I don't think I can handle being disappointed again'..." p. 91
 - *How would you propose supporting a spiritual directee in examining such underlying motives when their spiritual practice is erratic?*
 - *What kind of 'advice' might be helpful for you during similar 'stuck' times?*

3. "In terms of depression, desolations and 'dark nights,' unlike psychotherapy, the role of a spiritual director is not to solve the problem, or attempt to substitute desolation with consolation but rather to search to bring light into a 'dark night.' p. 102
 - *How could you support another in the process of 'seeing through' such states rather than trying to 'work through' the problem?*
 - *Carefully read May's descriptions of depression and dark nights in pages 102-112 and see if you can identify the difference between a psychological vs. a spiritual state of desolation in terms of your own life experience.*

C. DISCERNMENT-IN-PRACTICE "Practice and Praxis" CD, Jack Kennedy

1. "In order to help another in spiritual direction, the director must be on a path him/herself. Two qualities are essential: self awareness and interior freedom. Without these you cannot stay with the issues of another's experience..."
 - *Take some time reflecting on: What is your path right now? [or choose another metaphor].*
 - *Respond to one of the following additional questions that can clarify your 'path'...*
-In what ways do you experience being on your path? What does it mean for you to be faithful to your path? What are the recurring struggles that create curves, turns or dead ends on your path? What disciplines help you stay on the path?

2. "The focus of therapy is to try to cure, heal and fix a problem. In spiritual direction, the emphasis is on helping a person to discover their relationship with the Divine—especially in desolation."
 - *How does this teaching apply for a person who does not experience such a relationship?*
 - *How/have you encountered this kind of relationship in a time of desolation?*

3. "Holy Listening is paying attention to the words of another... or indeed to your own words/experiences, as if they were the last words spoken by an honored mentor."
 - *From your experiences with the spiritual direction track so far, where have you felt 'successful' in listening deeply to another... what obstacles have you encountered?*

