

ART OF SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT  
REFLECTION ASSIGNMENTS  
MONTH 7: ORDER/DISORDER



A. FAITH TRADITION PERSPECTIVE “Perennial Blessings from Hinduism” CD, R. Groves

1. Consider the “five fingers of the hand” metaphor of Fr. Bede Griffith as representing different religious traditions... and the palm representing what these traditions all hold in common.

**Sacred Questions:** *Do you see any similarities between Hindu perspectives on faith and your own spiritual tradition? Can you identify an aspect of Hinduism you would like to learn more about?*

2. Eastern religious traditions tend to emphasize a “way of living” more than a “way of believing.”

**Sacred Questions:** In what way do you see your own faith tradition as a “way of living.”? How might Gandhi’s teaching: “Be the change that you want to see in the world” challenge you?

3. Theology may be described as “telling stories about the divine.” Mysticism is an experience of the story at such a deep level that it is transformative. Hinduism emphasize the latter.

**Sacred Questions:** Have you ever had a “mystical experience” in the sense that you truly “knew” on an internal level something that you once had *only* believed?

4. Hinduism speaks about the four “ashrams” or stages of a person’s life:

- **Student** – beginner’s mind
- **Householder** – home builder, family maker and professional
- **Forest Dweller** – leaving it all behind to get the “big picture”
- **Sage** – having received everything, you can give it away

**Sacred Questions:** In which “ashram” do you currently dwell? What would a ‘forest dweller’ stage look like in our culture?

5. Karma can be described as “carrying the weight of human nature,” or “our” suffering. Dharma can be described as knowing what is right or being in alignment with it. One way of measuring suffering and inquiring about whether we are spiritually aligned is by reflecting on the question: “How often in a day are you offended?”

**Sacred Questions:** Track for one day or week how often and in what ways you have been offended. At the end of the period, review your observations. What lessons are revealed to you from this exercise?

## B. FOUNDATIONS FOR SPIRITUAL DIRECTION Care of Mind..., May, c. 7, 'Disorder'

1. "One of the more common concerns encountered by spiritual directors is the possibility of significant emotional or mental disorder in a directee. There was a time when many spiritual directors either had no knowledge of psychopathology or simply did not believe in it. That time is gone. Nowadays... we accept a more integrated view of the human person but [just as dangerously] a preoccupation with psychodynamics can reduce the entire process of spiritual guidance to 'psycho curiosity' avoiding any real confrontation with the transcendent dimensions of life." p 149
  - *How/do you resonate with this quote from your own experiences in the art of spiritual discernment track so far?*
  - *How do you find a balance between the spiritual and psychological dimensions of discernment in your own life?*
2. "There is a difference between the words, 'diagnosis' and 'discernment.' Diagnosis looks to label disorder so it can be corrected... discernment is generally seen as a more gifted process than diagnosis, a graced charism that happens through relationship." p. 152
  - *How do these distinctions speak to your experience of the Art of Discernment process?*
  - *Consider the opinion of the mystic Theresa of Avila who said that knowledge should not be underemphasized in the discernment process. In fact, she went so far as to say that a non-spiritual person with sufficient knowledge would make a better director than a spiritual person without proper knowledge... whose advice could be equally 'dangerous'!*
3. "Ideally, there should be no need for extensive labeling of any kind in spiritual direction. Whether labeling assumes psychiatric or religious categories, its overuse is likely to objectify the person and unnecessarily reduce the wonder of his/her reality. Labeling is too often a reductionistic process, causing us to focus on one or a few characteristics of the soul to the exclusion of others... we must be vigilant not to let such knowledge get in the way of our wonder." p. 178
  - *May provides many examples in this chapter from the language of psychotherapy that can be useful in understanding naturally arising human dynamics when working with others [e.g. Transference, Counter-Transference, Sexual Feelings, etc.] What insights into these issues might have gained since beginning this course on Spiritual Direction?*
  - *Although May says that we will benefit from enhanced awareness of human psychological dynamics, there is another 'force' at work in spiritual direction that we can trust. Allow yourself some time to journal your own feelings regarding the spiritual direction dynamic.*

## C. DISCERNMENT-IN-PRACTICE "Standing in the Tension" CD, Jack Kennedy

1. "Spiritual Direction calls us to become aware of standing in the tension between the world as it is and the world as it could be."

- *It is sometimes easier to hold this tension in terms of the outer world rather than the tensions/contractions of our 'inner world.' How do you relate to Jack's invitation to allow the Divine to hold with you the tension between what is and what could be?*
  - *Name an example of a tension [outer or inner] that you could name, hold and pay attention to... in a period of contemplative practice?*
2. "Diane Eck suggests that three dark cultural forces of our time are: [1] Addiction to Speed, [2] Consumerism and [3] Violence. Their antidotes are [1] Stillness, [2] Spaciousness and [3] Love.
- *How/does these observations speak to you?*
  - *Which of these cultural 'demons' are especially challenging for you at this time in your life?*
3. "Spiritual Discernment is not just about reporting your experiences but re-living them in order to savor their meaning... when you remember, you re-live ..."
- *How might you invite another into the process of holy remembering in order to savor and hear the deeper meaning of experiences that are otherwise passed over?*
  - *Jack recommends that we 'hold an experience' on our heart and invite the Divine to hold the experience with us. Try this exercise sometime and discover whether it is meaningful for you.*

