

**ART OF SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT  
REFLECTION ASSIGNMENTS  
MONTH FOUR: MIND**



**A. FAITH TRADITION PERSPECTIVE “Native Spirituality for Today” CD, Richard Groves**

1. “Primal Religion” refers not just to Native American spirituality but to African, South Pacific, Latin American, Aboriginal Australian and other indigenous cultures. Primal spirituality emphasizes that:
  - The way of life does not separate the sacred from the secular
  - Religion is more of a “neighborhood experience” rather than a “membership”
  - Oral tradition is more important than written records
  - Nature is the best teacher
  - The role of the “shaman” [spiritual director] is guide, teacher and healer
  - While there are different gender roles, there is a radical equality between men and women
  - There is no word of for “work” or “time” in native languages
  - The good of the tribe always takes precedence over the good of the individual

**Sacred Question** *Which of these characteristics speaks to you particularly and why?*

2. Community is necessary when engaged in “spiritual warfare.” In ancient traditions, confronting evil required the special “protection” of communal discernment.

**Sacred Question:** *What kinds of community do you turn when up against difficult decisions? When have you experienced the special “protection” of others when facing personal or corporate fears?*

3. A universal wisdom principle teaches that: “When we are facing something very important in our lives, we often find ourselves up against something equally as great or even greater working against it.”

**Sacred Question:** *When has this been true in your own life? What kinds of forces can work against one’s efforts to accomplish good?*

4. Native traditions are not afraid of naming the reality of evil. In primal religion, there is a teaching that “the dragon is not evil itself but not to believe in the “dragon” is the doom of earth people. At the same time there is an emphasis on confronting evil “out there” but also within my own heart

**Sacred Question:** *What are some of the means for uncovering darkness in your own heart? What are some of the means you have found useful in strengthening yourself against ‘evil’? For what might the ‘dragon’ be a metaphor?*

5. Some Native American traditions teach the importance of making decisions based on the ‘seven generation principle’—namely, make decisions today in terms of how they will impact the tribe seven generations from now.

**Sacred Question:** *How could this principle be useful in our modern, western culture? Think of examples of where this principle might apply to our global, ecological crisis.*

## B. FOUNDATIONS FOR SPIRITUAL DIRECTION Care of Mind, Care of Spirit, May, ch. 4, 'Mind'

1. "For years people believed that the unconscious represents the most profound level of being... but when spiritual matters are acknowledged, there are deeper dimensions still that one must consider..." p.54
  - *Can you name an example of where/when an unconscious resistance was subverting your conscious desires and intentions?*
  - *Have you had an experience of being psychologically desolate while still sensing deep peace?*
2. "We need to refrain from a temptation to label all deep and subtle uneasiness as pathological." p. 60
  - *What kinds of traps do you fall into that feed the modern, problem-solving tendency to make others [your directees] feel better? Can your Ennea-type shed any light on your tendencies?*
  - *How do you hold the tension that both pain and pleasure, joy and sadness, success and failure can work for or against our 'growth in spirit'? Reflect on this paradox in your life.*
3. "A positive self image is critical for healthy psychological development but the opposite can also be true that persons with positive self images may be less likely to feel and respond to their own internal longings for God..." p.70
  - *How would you assess your own self image at this time of life? Can you see a correlation between your own self image [either positively or negatively] and your openness to a relationship with the spiritual dimensions of life?*

## C. DISCERNMENT-IN-PRACTICE "Confronting the mystery of evil..." CD, Jack Kennedy

1. "There is a profound mystery when approaching the topic of evil... we will never completely understand it but it has more power over us if denied..."
  - *What kinds of reactions do you have to concepts related to 'evil'?*
  - *Consider any images or fears about evil from your personal past that have been harmful?*
2. "When assisting another person in spiritual direction who is dealing with evil, we need to be properly equipped..."
  - *How might you respond to a directee who appeared to be under the influence of a 'spirit of fear' or resistance or some other force beyond their control?*
  - *Have you had an experience with a similar movement in your life?*
3. "It is difficult to critique our own culture because we are often blind to our own complicity with evil."
  - *Can you name an example or experience with corporate/institutional 'sin' or evil?*
  - *What are some potential strategies for bringing the same problem from darkness into light?*

