



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..., May, c. 6, ‘Relationship’

1. “Besides differing from psychotherapy in intent, content and basic attitude, spiritual direction is generally surrounded by a characteristic atmosphere that is seldom encountered in other interpersonal relationships... As one person put it, ‘Being in spiritual direction is just like being in prayer, only there’s someone with me in it.’” p 113

- *How/do you resonate with this quote from your own experiences with spiritual direction?*
- *If you were to try and describe spiritual direction to a person who never heard of it, how would you describe the relationship?*

2. "It is my belief that the primary task of spiritual directors is to encourage within themselves a moment by moment attention towards God..." p. 116
 - *How/does this description challenge you? Name something in May's language that intrigues you to explore how this kind of 'third person' relationship might be possible?*
 - *How would you re-phrase May's belief for persons who are non-theistic in orientation?*

3. "It is neither possible nor desirable to entirely rid ourselves of distractions [when working with others in spiritual direction]... and in fact, many of them can serve us and others quite well..." p. 119
 - *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 "God's Plan vs. God's Project" CD, Jack Kennedy

1. "What some people call 'God's Will' is not something 'out there' to be figured out but a dynamic process that invites us into a creative relationship..."
 - *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. "Ignatius suggests that a more helpful notion than 'God's Project' might be 'God's Plan.'ion, 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?*

