

## AFTERWORD

Spiritual direction isn't a cure-all or a one-size-fits-all answer to your spiritual problems. But it is a great adventure that can support you, help you stay focused on your spiritual practice, and help you grow in ways that will delight and surprise and challenge you. It is a ministry of accompaniment, of hospitality, and of mindful attention. It doesn't work quickly, but slowly, over many years. It doesn't change us, but sustains us through a process of transformation in both our inner and outer lives. Spiritual direction doesn't give us any answers, but it holds us and encourages us as we ask all the right questions, questions that cut to the heart of who we are, what we are here for, and what—in our heart of hearts—we are called to be. Spiritual direction is not a destination, but a journey.

That is not a journey for the faint of heart. That's why we don't walk the path alone, but with another, one who respects us and prays for and with us, one for whom our spiritual flourishing is the number-one priority.

Welcome to the journey.

## INTRODUCTION

to those who are being introduced to this ministry for the first time. Again, I choose to opt for the word that will be immediately understandable to the widest number of readers.

Another choice I made was to refer to spiritual directors throughout using the feminine gender. I was about a quarter of the way through this manuscript when I wrote the mind-bogglingly awkward sentence, "He or she is a professional, and if his or her space is not professional, his or her business will suffer." That's when I started thinking, "This may not be the way to go about this." To avoid such unnecessary clunkiness in the prose, I decided to speak of all spiritual directors using the pronouns "she" and "her" rather than "he or she" or "his or her." The fact is that there are far more women than men doing spiritual direction—and most of us men who do it are pretty in touch with our inner feminine—so I don't expect many protests. I apologize to any of my fellow male spiritual directors who might take offense, and invite them to write their own books full of awkward and clunky prose.

Finally, some thank-yous are in order. Great thanks to the Rev. Anne Jensen, Rev. James Ford, and Ravi Verma for reading the first draft of this book and offering much helpful feedback.

Now that such housekeeping is out of the way, let's talk about spiritual direction...

## LET'S TALK ABOUT SPIRITUAL DIRECTION



### WHAT IS SPIRITUAL DIRECTION?

There isn't one answer to this question. And any answer I could give would be incomplete. A poetic answer might be: two souls basking in the Divine Presence. A clinical answer might be: a helping profession in which the director assists the client in his or her spiritual flourishing. A theological answer might be: one beggar showing another beggar where to find bread (Martin Luther's definition of ministry in general).

But for the purposes of this book I'm going to say: In spiritual direction, two or more seekers enter sacred space to dream, explore, and discern a path toward personal wholeness and deeper intimacy with the Divine. Usually this journey is a one-to-one, face-to-face meeting, with one seeker acting in service to the other. Often, they speak. Often, they don't.

Along the way, they talk about just about everything that happens in life—work, play, relationships, personal struggles—but always the question comes back to a central question: how is the ✕ Divine wooing us, calling us into deeper and deeper intimacy?

As we go deeper, more questions emerge: What is the Divine "up to" in all of our daily ups and downs? How is the Divine moving and nudging and forming us, through both our triumphs and our defeats? How do we resist the Divine call? How does the Divine's desire for intimacy threaten us and push us beyond our comfort zones? What does this intimacy require of us? What is it calling us to? In what ways are we out of congruence with the deepest truth of our souls—with this Divine calling—and how does this imprison us and limit us? How can we move into deep places of interior freedom that are transformative and healing and liberating, not only for us, but for the world?

Those are Big Questions. Spiritual direction is often the only place in our lives that many of us have to deeply explore such questions, witnessed by another soul, without judgment or condescension. It is the place where we can be encouraged and challenged to open ourselves more deeply than we ever thought was possible. This is deeply healing work.

One metaphor that I like is that of the spiritual director as couple's counselor. The couple, of course, is you and the Divine. Both of you want deeper intimacy, but how do you get there? Intimacy is scary, and often the things that get in our way aren't even conscious. The spiritual director is there to hold the space, to speak what she notices, and to help guide you and the Divine into the kind of deep and meaningful connection that you both desire.

Spiritual direction is also a place to work through big decisions in our lives, where we can consider which choices are most in congruence with our soul, with our deepest longings, and with the sacred covenants we have made.

A word that is very important in the spiritual direction community is "discernment." Whether we are discerning the Divine will for our lives, how the Divine is showing up in our lives, how the Divine is challenging or wooing us, or whether we are discerning life changes large or small, discernment is a primary focus in any spiritual direction session.

### WHAT IF A PERSON DOESN'T BELIEVE IN GOD?

People of many faiths—and none—are discovering that spiritual direction is a helpful ministry for them. Theistic traditions (those who believe in a personal, conscious deity) often use the language of love and romance to discuss the kind of relationship the Divine wants to have with each of us. The mystics of the world's religions often practice what is called "love mysticism." They write about how the Divine is wooing the soul of the poet, who in turn longs for his or her Beloved. It is because of this common trope in theistic traditions that we employ the language of "intimacy" when describing the goal of spiritual direction.

Yet what is intimacy about? It's about connection and union. While non-theistic traditions—such as Buddhism and humanistic nature mysticism—don't speak of "intimacy" they do speak of connection with all beings and the unity of all being. Yet this, too, is a kind of intimacy.

"Connection" and "unity" are useful concepts and they often arise in spiritual direction. But for the purposes of this book we are going to emphasize the concept of "intimacy" because there is a quality inherent in that word—a sweetness and a longing—that is simply not present in the other terms.

It is difficult to find words that apply across the spectrum to people of every conceivable belief system, so I ask non-theists to make this small translation: when I say "intimacy" please hear "connection" or "union"—but coming from a deep place that every human heart cries out for.

### WHAT LEADS A PERSON TO SPIRITUAL DIRECTION?

Many things can lead a person to seek spiritual direction. Sometimes people have powerful mystical experiences that they don't understand or can't explain, and they need a safe space to explore their import. Sometimes people are wrestling with difficult

beliefs, or have been spiritually wounded and want to heal. Some people are in the process of changing beliefs and need support as they sort through what they will keep and what they will discard. Other people have important life choices to make and want to make sure they are listening to their deepest wisdom before they make a commitment.

All of these are common, but most commonly people come to spiritual direction simply because they want to grow closer to the Divine, they want a richer, more fulfilling spiritual life, or they want support as they deepen their spiritual practice.

This will change, too. Often a person will come for one reason, but a year or two later, a different reason will emerge. Spiritual direction is a flexible ministry that can meet us where we are at, and can continue to support us as we grow and change spiritually.

#### HOW IS SPIRITUAL DIRECTION DIFFERENT FROM THERAPY OR PASTORAL COUNSELING?

On the surface, spiritual direction and psychotherapy often look very similar. Two people meet in an office. They talk for an hour. Then they make an appointment for their next meeting. Usually payment is made. The client leaves and another client comes.

But that's where the similarity ends. In psychotherapy, the therapist and client are focused on the client's emotional life. But in spiritual direction, the spiritual director and client are focused on the client's spiritual life. Also, people usually enter therapy because they are experiencing some difficulty in their lives, usually as a result of emotional wounding or trauma. But in spiritual direction, we do not assume there is a problem.

Sure, sometimes people go to spiritual direction because they have a specific spiritual problem or issue they want to work on, but mostly we just assume that people come to spiritual direction because they want to go deeper in their spiritual practice and move into a place of deeper intimacy with the Divine.

Many people confuse spiritual direction and pastoral counseling, but there are important differences. Just as with therapists, people go to pastoral counselors because they are experiencing some kind of problem in their lives, and they are looking for help and support from a pastoral advisor whom they trust to use the resources of their faith—scripture, tradition, and theology—to help them reach a resolution.

Because pastoral counseling is crisis-oriented, it is short-term. A person might meet with her pastoral counselor two or three times, until a way through the crisis has been found. Spiritual direction, however, is not crisis-driven, and it is usually long-term. A client might see her spiritual director for many years, often more than ten years!

Certainly, there will be many crises discussed in spiritual direction during those ten years, but the crisis will never be the center of the discussion—that will always be the lure of the Divine into greater and greater intimacy. The spiritual director may discuss how the crisis is affecting that intimacy, or how the Divine is moving within or through the crisis in order to call the client into greater intimacy, but intimacy will always be the center point of the discussion.

Nevertheless, spiritual direction is a highly specialized form of spiritual guidance, and spiritual guidance comes in many forms. Many of us, at some time in our lives, have received important spiritual guidance from parents, teachers, therapists, counselors, 12-step sponsors, and even random strangers. Spiritual guidance can come from pretty much anyone! The ministry of spiritual direction is both similar to and different from all of these: while spiritual guidance can come in many forms, spiritual direction is a very focused, intentional, and (usually) long-term helping relationship.

## A SHORT HISTORY OF SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

Spiritual guidance is as old as human spirituality itself. As soon as human beings began to discern a spiritual dimension to life, we began to ask older and wiser members of our community for advice. Such personal mentoring is probably the oldest form of spiritual direction.

But as religions developed and became more complex, a clergy class emerged in most of them, whether this was the shaman, the rabbi, the priest or the roshi. These clergy people became the go-to folks for spiritual guidance, and in most traditions, this is still the case. They were (and are) often seen as the "experts" in the spiritual life.

Since they were seen (and often saw themselves) as experts, the traditional approach to spiritual guidance in most traditions has been pretty hierarchical. It was often patriarchal as well—spiritual guidance was usually of the "father knows best" variety. The "expert" told you what to do if you wanted to grow spiritually, and most people—those who were sincerely seeking to grow spiritually—obeyed. (While there have always been laypeople who offered spiritual guidance in most traditions, they were often marginalized and unacknowledged.)

While this "directive" approach was undeniably fruitful for many, it led to widespread abuses in most traditions—and this is equally true of both Eastern and Western religions. Spiritual leaders often imposed their beliefs on their followers, policed their doctrine, and assumed that their own path was normative for everyone. This has led to the wounding of many tender souls throughout history. In the West, the arrogance and elitism of a hierarchical approach to religion, religious instruction, and spiritual guidance has led many to leave traditional faiths in the dust (and in disgust).

But something significant happened in the 1960s and 1970s. Some Roman Catholic nuns began to forge a new way to offer

spiritual guidance, which they called the "non-directive method." Informed by St. Ignatius, who counseled spiritual directors "not to lean or incline in either direction but rather, while standing by like the pointer of a scale in equilibrium, to allow the Creator to deal immediately with the creature and the creature with its Creator..." (*Spiritual Exercises*, 15).

Similarly influenced by psychologist Carl Rogers (one of the founders of humanistic or "client-centered" therapy), the non-directive method assumes the client is the expert on his or her own spiritual life, not the clergyperson or the director. The director is seen as simply a fellow traveler on the spiritual journey. The director may point out what she sees and may offer suggestions for practice, but the client is always empowered to take or leave the director's advice.

This nonhierarchical approach minimized the potential for abuse, and it was widely popular in Roman Catholic circles. The word got around, and in the late 1970s Protestants asked the nuns to train them in the non-directive method, and in the 1980s and 1990s Buddhists and Jews asked to be trained in the new method as well. Each of these later formed schools of spiritual direction themselves, teaching the non-directive method in their own religious contexts for use with their own members.

## DIRECTIVE AND NON-DIRECTIVE METHODS TODAY

Today, the non-directive method is the normative technique taught in almost all spiritual direction training programs, regardless of the spiritual tradition the program is rooted in. There are nearly 250 training programs in the United States alone, of widely different traditions, which speaks to how powerful and effective the non-directive method can be.

That said, the directive method is enjoying a bit of a comeback. In our effort to get as far away from the abuses of the directive method as possible, many spiritual directors believe we have

swung too far in the other direction, effectively offering little direction at all. They believe a middle ground or a "synthesis" should be sought.

In actual practice, this is exactly what happens. Some people do not need much direction—they are very much self-directed, and for them, the role of the spiritual director is largely to hold space and listen. But some clients require a little more support and a little more active guidance. This can include redirecting the client back to the subject of intimacy, offering suggestions for spiritual practice, and even assigning homework.

Most spiritual directors intuitively gauge how directive or non-directive they should be. While some spiritual directors will naturally be more directive than others, for most of us, how directive or non-directive we actually are will vary from client to client, based on the client's personality and needs.

How directive or non-directive your spiritual director will be with you will probably be intuitive, too. Of course, you may ask directly for your spiritual director to move in one direction or another. If you feel like your director is offering too many suggestions, you can simply ask them to back off. They will! Most often, though (and counter-intuitively) people find they want more structure than they are receiving. Suggestions and homework are often helpful and welcome. You can ask your spiritual director for more of those, too.

The most important thing to remember is that in the non-directive method, you (the client) are in control. Your spiritual director has no power over you. Nor does she have any authority over you. She does not know what is "right" for you, nor does she have any right to correct your thinking or your beliefs. You are the expert on your own spiritual life, not your spiritual director. You get to negotiate how directive or non-directive your director should be in order to receive the maximum benefits of your time together.

## TRAINING FOR SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS

Training for spiritual directors is incredibly important. The non-directive method is not intuitive, and without training people quite naturally fall into advice-giving, "fixing," correcting people's beliefs, and—even more dangerous—they can fall into abusive behaviors.

The problem is that spiritual direction is not a licensed ministry. Technically, anyone can hang out a shingle and call themselves a spiritual director without any training at all. While this practice is legal, it is certainly not ethical. All responsible spiritual directors are in agreement that a person cannot practice ethically without proper training.

Training for spiritual direction is open to anyone with a genuine call to this ministry. One doesn't need a Bachelor's or Master's degree. One doesn't need to be a clergyperson. One must simply feel an authentic call and be willing to be trained. However, some training programs will not admit students who are under thirty-five years of age, because they don't feel they have sufficient life experience to direct others well. Other programs welcome even people in their early twenties. All programs will go through a discernment process to assess whether a student seems like a good candidate for the ministry.

Training programs are often of wildly different durations—some are month-long intensives, some last a year, some two years, and some even three years. Most have approximately the same number of classroom hours, however, and the difference is usually how much time there is between each class. For instance, a three-year program might meet for three hours every other week, while a one-year program might consist of four five-day intensives. The program I direct at the Chaplaincy Institute includes 120 classroom hours, 30 hours of spiritual direction, 12 hours of supervision, and 18 hours of client practice—a total of 180 hours.

You can be confident that if your spiritual director has

completed a reputable training program, she will companion you ethically and responsibly. Whether she will companion you *effectively* is another matter. That will have more to do with your personal compatibility—see more about that below.

#### HOW TO FIND A SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR

This is the first question people often ask me when they hear about the ministry of spiritual direction—“How do I find a spiritual director?” And just as often, “How do I find a *good* one?”

There are several ways:

- If you belong to a spiritual tradition that is familiar with the ministry, you can ask your clergy or trusted elders in your community for a referral.
- You can also call a training program in your area and ask for a referral.
- Go to the Spiritual Directors International website ([www.sdiworld.org](http://www.sdiworld.org)) and click on “Find a Spiritual Director.” There you’ll be invited to enter your postal code, and you’ll soon be face-to-face with a map showing every spiritual director in your area, along with their phone numbers and religious affiliations.

I suggest you make a list of about six people from this map. Call each of them and have a short, ten-minute conversation. Choose three of these that you feel a connection with and make appointments to see them. At the end of those three appointments, you’ll have a good idea which spiritual director is going to be the best fit for you.

Don’t worry, you won’t hurt anyone’s feelings by deciding to work with one spiritual director over another. As I’ve stated before, spiritual directors are big on the word “discernment,” and

they will encourage you to discern well in finding just the right spiritual director to work with.

Please note that your spiritual director does not need to be from the same spiritual or religious background you are. Some of the best matches are of people from different traditions. For instance, I am a Christian, but I went to a Jewish spiritual director for fourteen years, and it was one of the most significant and important relationships of my life. A director outside of your own tradition can often possess a helpful distance and detachment from it that can be very illuminating. She may feel more “safe” than someone who is part of your own tradition.

(By the way, don’t be afraid of nuns! Even if you’re a Protestant or a Buddhist, in my experience Roman Catholic nuns are kind of wild women and amazing spiritual directors. Don’t let the habit scare you off.)

During your initial interview, it’s good to ask what your prospective spiritual director will charge for your time together. Please keep in mind that you are not paying for their companionship, but for their time—which is a very valuable commodity for any of us. Spiritual directors vary widely in what they charge for their time. Interns usually charge nothing, while beginning spiritual directors often charge between \$25 and \$50 per session. More experienced spiritual directors often charge between \$50 and \$100. Very experienced directors may charge even more. Directors in the heartland of the US are usually on the lower end of this scale, while directors on the coasts (where the cost of living is much higher) tend toward the higher end. Some spiritual directors consider their ministry a gift to the world and do not charge at all. These are treasured souls, but rare! Most spiritual directors must charge, as they have mortgages and bills to pay. Please remember that the “workers are worthy of their wage,” and that your director’s time is valuable.

Please keep in mind that the professional organization for spiritual directors, Spiritual Directors International, does not

screen members. In other words, people who wake up one day and decide to call themselves spiritual directors without a single day of training can join the professional organization and can be listed on their website. The vast majority of folks listed on the SDI website have proper training, but some do not, so buyer beware. If you look for your spiritual director through the SDI website, please make sure you ask whether your prospective director completed a training program, and if so, which one.

## PREPARING FOR A SESSION



People who come to spiritual direction are of all types. With some clients, I don't have to say a word. From the moment we begin they are off and running, and all I really need to do is smile and nod occasionally. (Oh, and sometimes suggest that we might be off-topic.) These are what I call "fire hose" clients—folks who are so eager for the safe space of spiritual direction that they can hardly contain themselves.

But other clients have a hard time getting started. Often, they are not used to spiritual direction and might feel intimidated by it. After all, if you've spent your whole life *not* talking about the most important relationship in your life—because you're afraid people will think you're crazy or because it isn't considered polite—just having someone say, "Okay, talk about it now," doesn't mean you can. It might take a while. And that's okay, because the space of an hour is a luxurious block of time. (Although once you get going, that hour will pass very quickly indeed.)

If you find that words don't come easily, you may have to work a little harder. Some preparation will really help with this. One thing you can do to help with this is to pay attention to the



thoughts, feelings, and sensations that arise during your spiritual practice.

By “spiritual practice” I mean anything that makes you feel most fully alive or anything you do to get closer to the Divine. Perhaps this is a regular prayer time or a sitting meditation practice. It can also include forms of active meditation such as Tai Chi or walking meditation. It can even include such practices as feeding the hungry or visiting the old or infirm.

Everyone is different, and the ways we connect to the Divine will be different, too. But whatever it is you do, pay attention as you do it. What thoughts arise as you are doing your practice? In many practices, such as meditation, thoughts are sometimes seen as a distraction and something to be avoided. Yet in other forms of practice (even other forms of meditation) the thoughts that arise contain valuable information, and attention to them is part of the practice. So long as you do not let your thoughts hijack your practice session and take you out of the present moment, they can be useful no matter what your practice is.

The kinds of thoughts that arise might not make a lot of sense to you, but they can be the key to unlocking profound truths about you and your relationship with the Divine. “Why do I think about my mother’s disapproval whenever I try to meditate?” or “Why do I think about sex every time I sit down to pray?” are both great questions to take to your spiritual director—and both are teeming with possibilities.

Your emotions are also a valuable guide in your spiritual journey. Does your spiritual practice leave you feeling energized or drained? Those are important feelings to take to your spiritual director. What if your spiritual practice leaves you confused or conflicted? Take those feelings to your director, too. We are whole beings, and everything in our lives can have bearing on our relationship with the Divine.

Most people get why thoughts and feelings might be important, but bodily sensations? The fact is that our bodies contain

much wisdom that our conscious minds are often oblivious to. If you were to show up and say, “Every time I try to pray, I feel this pain in my left shoulder,” your spiritual director would most likely be very curious indeed, and would have many questions for you—one of which might unlock a door that you never knew was there. But your body knows. And it is actually speaking to us all the time. Most of the time, however, we’re not really listening. Spiritual direction can provide the spaciousness for us to let the body speak. We’ll talk more about this later.

#### MAKE A LIST

Another thing you can do to avoid that deer-in-the-headlights “what now” feeling is to keep a running list of things you want to discuss. If you’re someone who keeps a notebook or a day planner nearby, this is easy. I keep a list on my reminders app on my iPhone.

The things on this list can be anything you want to bring up with your director. If you hold a fairly conventional Jewish or Christian view of the Divine, your list might include things like these:

- What is prayer for if God already knows what I need?
- Meditation is boring. Why is it so many other people seem to get something out of it?
- I’m afraid if I tell God the truth, he’ll hate me
- Whenever I try to pray, all I can think about is cheese. What’s up with that?
- I don’t even know what I’m feeling most of the time—how can I share that with God?
- Remind director I’ll be away in July
- I think I’m allergic to spiritual community
- What if this whole God thing is delusional?

- When I think about what God wants from me, I seize up. What am I afraid of?

...And so on. If you keep a running list all month, you will have more than you can possibly discuss by the time you sit down with your spiritual director. Any theological wrestlings are fair game, as are your experiences in prayer or meditation (or other spiritual practices). Your experiences in spiritual community will also provide plenty to explore. Above all, make sure to take note of your feelings for your Divine Beloved, and whatever struggles you discover in your relationship with the Beloved.



#### WRITE DOWN YOUR DREAMS

Another thing you might try in preparation for your session is writing down your dreams. Dreams are often a rich source of spiritual wisdom, and most spiritual directors are eager to hear about them. The problem with dreams is that they are often ephemeral—they dissipate quickly upon waking. Writing them down the moment you wake up is a great way to preserve them. Keeping a pad and pencil near your bed will help with this.

It will also help you to dream. All of us dream whenever we are sleeping, but many people do not remember their dreams, or don't realize they have dreamt at all. Strangely, going to bed with an intention to remember your dreams can actually help you remember them!

You don't need to remember the whole dream for it to be valuable. Sometimes just an image or a feeling is enough to gain insight. Write down whatever you remember and bring it to your session.

There are many ways to approach a dream, and your spiritual director will probably have many ideas on this herself. One way of looking at it that I find valuable is understanding the dream as a symbolic snapshot of everything that is happening in your life

right now. Making connections between elements in the dream and aspects of your own life can often be very enlightening.

Usually, the Divine is part of the dream. Unfortunately, the Divine is not always the "good guy" in the dream. I remember a client who said that night after night he dreamt that he was being chased through the streets by an attacker. When we finally got done unpacking the dream, the only question left on the table was, "Why are you running away from God?" It was the beginning of a much deeper vein of exploration.

Even dreams about violence or rape can have a sacred dimension. After all, rape is not just an act of violence, but is also an act of unwanted intimacy. If we have been spiritually wounded, the depth of intimacy that the Divine wants to share with us can be unwelcome and scary. The dream is often showing us in symbolic terms exactly what is going on in our spiritual lives. Spiritual direction provides a safe space to unpack dreams and interpret them, allowing us to stay focused on the questions that are uncomfortable or that we usually choose to avoid.

have another client waiting to come in at the top of the hour. If your spiritual director sees five people in a day, each at the top of the hour, you can see why she would not want to fall behind—it would not be fair to her other clients. Plus, your director needs time to use the facilities and straighten up before the next client comes in.

"That's our time" will only come as a surprise once. It might be annoying a second time, but you'll soon get the hang of it and anticipate it. One thing that will happen is that you will learn to go deeper, faster, in order to have more time to work. You will learn to shorten the first half where you are "wandering" and debriefing and will get down to the real business of your work together sooner.

Before long, your own internal clock will be set, and you'll find yourself saying to your director, "Well, that's gotta be about our time." Your director will smile when you say that.

## WHAT YOUR DIRECTOR WILL EXPECT FROM YOU



In order for your spiritual direction session to run smoothly, and to get the most done in the small amount of time you have together, your spiritual director will expect certain things of you. In this chapter, we'll talk about those things, since many times these "expectations" go unsaid. Since your spiritual director has probably been doing this a long time and often works with clients who have also been at it for quite a while, she might forget what it's like to be a "newbie" and will forget that you don't know all the rules or the secret handshake. (That was a joke. There is no secret handshake. In case you were wondering.)

## COME PREPARED TO YOUR SESSION

Your time is valuable—and so is your director's. Yes, it's true, you will probably be paying your director for her time, but she will still want to use that time productively. Just how productive your time will be will often be determined by how prepared you are when you come in for a session.

Of course, you can never be prepared for what happens in a

session—that is always gift and surprise. It is never something you can predict or plan out. But your session will be much more productive if you have given some thought to your session beforehand.

That might mean going over the list you've been making for the past month of things you want to talk about in your session, and picking out the one or two items that have the most energy for you.

It might mean praying about your session before you go in, sitting silent before the Divine and asking for help discerning the most important topics to discuss, and asking that your session be blessed and fruitful.

It might mean taking ten minutes after arriving but before going in to center yourself and meditate. (This requires planning!)

After some trial and error, you'll have a good sense of what good preparation looks like *for you*. However you do it, this expectation is about mindfulness—about taking your session seriously, and making sure that you are in the best place to get the most out of it.

#### CARRY THE WEIGHT IN THE SESSION

Your session is *your session*—it's your dime and your time. If you show up and just sit there, not speaking or making any effort, your director is perfectly within her rights to simply sit there with you. She might think what you need is silence, and she will be happy to share that silence with you. Or she might sense that something is amiss and ask you about it. The point is that it's not your spiritual director's job to keep the conversation going in the spiritual direction session. It's not *about* conversation, really, but companionship. So if you don't speak, there could be a lot of silence. Your spiritual director will be comfortable with silence, but will you be?

Maybe so. Maybe your soul is thirsty for silence in the pres-



ence of another. If so, this is a good and productive use of your time together.

If you have arrived at the session unprepared (see above), you could find yourself stumbling around, looking for something to talk about, and passing your valuable time away with filler that doesn't really pertain to your spiritual life as such.

But if you have prepared, then you will know deep in your heart of hearts what needs to be shared that day. You will know what it is within you that needs to be witnessed. You will know the questions that cry out for answers. You will feel the longing for your secret name, and that longing will pull you on, even if you can't exactly see the path.

The most important thing to remember, however, is that this time is yours, and whether it is a useful and productive time or not lies squarely on your shoulders. Your spiritual director is available to you, with every scrap of attention that she can muster on that particular day. But she does not know your soul, does not know what it is within you that most needs expression. She does not know what your soul has been wrestling with, or what is tripping you up with your spiritual practice. You must tell her. Only you can "bring it." ✕

#### IF YOU MISS AN APPOINTMENT

What happens if you have a flat tire on your way to a session? That—or something very like that—has happened to all of us. Your spiritual director will understand completely and will not hold it against you—so long as you let her know. When something unforeseen strikes, just give your spiritual director a call or shoot her a text. "Got a flat tire—gotta reschedule" is a short text message, but will do the job handily. That lets your spiritual director know that you can't make it, why you can't make it, and that you'll be in touch soon to get another appointment on the calendar. Easy!