

### **For the Eastern Traditions:**

"To live one's life in union with the Divine and to realize the freedom of one's highest Self is the ultimate goal of the Eastern philosophy of Yoga. Spiritual direction, from the perspective of Yoga, is founded on the understanding that God lives within the hearts of each of us and of all creation.

The aim of spiritual direction is the formation of a partnership between God, the directee, and the director in a holy alchemy, which lovingly upholds the directee during exploration and deepening of one's relationship with God, others, all creation, and the higher Self.

Through deep listening, powerful questions, and reflection of the thoughts and feelings conveyed by the directee, spiritual direction provides an opportunity to regularly reflect on life's events and circumstances from a spiritual perspective.

Spiritual practices, including spiritual direction, have the ability to expand one's inner awareness where stillness, peace, happiness, and joy reside; meditation, contemplation, chanting, or hatha yoga may be offered as tools to support the directee in experiencing God in every moment of this sacred dance called life.

With grace, self-effort, and the support of a spiritual director, directees can fully awaken to their inner divinity and express their true natures of love, compassion, and service in their everyday lives."

*Donna Woods, Philosophy of Yoga*

### **For the Islamic Tradition:**

Sufism is the mystical core of Islam. Although Sufism is more prominent in Muslim countries, its ideas, practices, and teachers can be found throughout the world. The practices of Sufism are often thought of as spiritual medicines and the sheikh, or guide, is the physician. According to an old Turkish Sufi saying, 'You can bandage a cut for yourself, but you can't take out your own appendix.' That is, we can learn and grow through our own efforts, but for profound spiritual transformation we need a guide. The guide inspires and teaches students to move closer to realizing their inner, divine nature. That teaching is in itself an expression of divine will. Rumi writes, 'Whoever travels without a guide needs two hundred years for a two-day journey.'

*Robert Frager, PhD*

Spiritual direction is for individuals who are beginning, or have long walked the spiritual path. No matter your spiritual background, spiritual direction will help you learn to recognize the divine within yourself and the world.

The process of spiritual direction will assist you in developing a deep understanding of self, a healthy orientation to others, and a full appreciation of our shared human existence.

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# What is Spiritual Direction?

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Spiritual  
Practices  
&  
Soul Care  
For  
Everyone



## An Introduction

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The origins of spiritual direction date back thousands of years. The process of spiritual direction is an ancient and venerable tradition in every culture and region of the globe. Like psychotherapy, it is often offered as a one-to-one or group experience in private sessions with spiritual mentors who have completed extensive formation for the ministry and service of spiritual direction.

Inside are descriptions of what Spiritual direction looks like in the context of various faith traditions. Of course, you may not identify with a particular tradition. Like many today, you might identify yourself as “*spiritual but not religious*”. All people everywhere possess a soul - that part of us which informs every aspect of our being. Like the body and the mind, the soul needs tending. The same process for spiritual direction applies whether or not one aligns with any faith tradition: cultivating a one-on-one, confidential relationship involving trust, deep listening and companionship along the spiritual journey.

***Welcome to Spiritual Direction!***

## The Many Faces of Spiritual Direction

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### **For the Christian:**

"The whole purpose of spiritual direction is to penetrate beneath the surface of a person's life, to get behind the façade of conventional gestures and attitudes which one presents to the world, and to bring out one's inner spiritual freedom, one's inmost truth, which is what [Christians] call the likeness of Christ in one's soul. This is an entirely supernatural (spiritual) thing, for the work of rescuing the inner person from automatism belongs first of all to the Holy Spirit."

*Thomas Merton, Trappist monk*

"We define Christian spiritual direction as help given by one Christian to another which enables that person to pay attention to God's personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship."

*William A. Barry, SJ and William J. Connolly, SJ, Center for Religious Development, Cambridge, Massachusetts*

"Spiritual direction can mean different things to different people. Some people understand it to be the art of listening carried out in the context of a trusting relationship. It is when one person is trained to be a competent guide who then “companions” another person, listening to that person's life story with an ear for the movement of the Holy, of the Divine."

*Rev. Jeffrey S. Gaines*

Spiritual Direction is primarily interested in our universal spiritual experience which necessitates the capacity and willingness to notice God through many lenses. Direction is not about telling people what to believe or how to act but working with the Spirit to discover, surface, name for themselves, and engage in what God is doing in the context of their lives and the world."

*Rev. Kenton Smith*

### **For the Jewish Tradition:**

"The object of spiritual direction is to cultivate one's ability to discern God's presence in one's life—to notice and appreciate moments of holiness, to maintain an awareness of the interconnectedness of all things, to explore ways to be open to the Blessed Holy One in challenging and difficult moments as well as in joyful ones.

The director serves as a companion and witness, someone who helps you (sometimes with questions, sometimes just by listening) to discern the divine where you might have missed it and to integrate that awareness into your daily life, your tefillah, your tikkun olam work, your study, your ritual practice."

*Rabbi Jacob Staub*

### **For the Buddhist:**

Spiritual direction is encompassed in the Buddhist student-teacher relationship; the connection between spiritual director and spiritual directee is most reminiscent of the ‘spiritual friend’ relationship—known in ancient Pali as *kalyanamitta*.

This sacred friendship is one in which there is a depth of connection and commitment—a joining together through empathy and wisdom. In “Buddhist” spiritual direction, the spiritual director, in mindful presence, shares in a heartfelt way, the feelings expressed by the spiritual directee—meeting the spiritual directee's inherent goodness—the sacred still place within.

Through empathy and wisdom, the spiritual director skillfully leads the spiritual directee to know his or her inherent goodness, inspiring the spiritual directee to envision and meet his or her true potential. Mindfulness practices are often introduced as tools to enhance clear seeing and ease of well-being."

*Karin J. Miles, MA, spiritual director and mentor, Interfaith Spiritual Center, Portland, Oregon*