

## Working with the Emotions in Spiritual Direction: Seven Guiding Principles

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**F**elicity Hillesum, the young Jewish mystic who died at Auschwitz in 1943, writes in her diary entry for May 18, 1942, that as the threats grew greater and the terror increased day to day, she drew prayer around herself like a dark protective wall from which she could step outside calmer and stronger. In other entries she describes her joy in the jasmine behind her house, her despair at the blisters on her feet, the dog-tired feeling of standing in long lines—and then the peace that gradually came to her. Along with these emotions, yet another feeling is growing daily in her, she says. It is the hint of eternity that steals through her smallest daily thoughts and activities, a sense that she is not alone in her tiredness or sickness or fears but at one with millions of others throughout the ages (pp. 139, 158–165).

The candid, haunting pages of Hillesum's diary, *An Interrupted Life*, reveal the gradual weaving of universal human emotions—fear, sexual desire, despair, compassion, joy—into a life of spiritual courage and depth. We long for the kind of integration Hillesum describes so movingly, but emotions have not always been so fully honored in the spiritual life. Some writers, Ignatius of Loyola for one, accorded them an important role in spirituality. But many other strands of religious tradition relegated feelings to an inferior and suspect status. Judged to be manifestations of female weakness and less trustworthy than the rational powers assigned to males, emotions often came up short as spiritual guides. Some, like anger, found themselves included in lists of deadly sins. Strong feeling must be bridled like a skittish horse, we were warned, lest passion cloud reason and pull us off course.

Happily, a new respect for emotional experience charac-

terizes the current movement toward holistic spirituality. This spirituality emphasizes the intrinsic bond between mind and body, reason and emotion. Feminists have contributed to a holistic vision by unmasking the sexism that assigned realities such as body, intuition, imagination, and emotion to women and then accorded them a subordinate status. As a result, spiritual literature increasingly acknowledges the central role emotions play in the full humanity and holiness of both women and men. But because feelings are so complex and, like all human experience, capable of distortion as well as wisdom, we struggle with knowing how to integrate them into a healthy spirituality. My experience through the years as psychotherapist and spiritual director leads me to suggest seven guiding principles for working with the emotions in spiritual direction.

### *Holistic spirituality emphasizes the intrinsic bond between mind and body, reason and emotion.*

#### 1. Emotions belong at the center of spirituality, not at its edges.

Any aspect of experience can mediate the Divine, and feelings often provide a powerful window to the Holy. We meet the Creator Spirit in the rush of awe that envelops us before a stunning sunrise or in the gratitude we feel for the intricate beauty of Indian paintbrush on a mountain trail. We discover God in the longing to find our own deepest voice and in the anguish we feel for a friend injured in an accident. The power of the Spirit lives also in the world community's compassion for those trapped in situations of poverty and violence and in the passion of those who struggle to right such injustice. The twelfth-century Rhineland mystic, Hildegard of Bingen, expresses poetically this truth about God's Spirit: "I stir everything into quickness with a certain invisible life which sustains all" (Bowie and Davies, p. 92). We name this encompassing divine presence the depth, fountain, or

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the wellsprings from the trough of such events; taking deeper insight into what such tragedies mean for the wellspring of all created energies, for God's dwelling in creation is all-pervading.

God's love for us is the ultimate foundation of a healthy emotional life. Studies of fear and anger, envy and jealousy show how closely aligned these emotions are with our ability to love ourselves. People with low self-love are more likely to get angry when there is no cause and to nurse the anger for longer periods of time. They are also especially prone to envy, jealousy, and anxiety because they view others as more adequate and successful than themselves. Emotions tell us what we value and the importance of what we care about. When what we love is attacked, we feel anger; when it is affirmed, we experience joy; when it is threatened, we become afraid. But we often sense a threat where none exists, or we exaggerate its magnitude. We seem unable to believe in the love available to us, thus limiting our happiness and zest for living. A healthy emotional life depends on continual immersion in the divine love that gradually deepens our sense of being lovable and loved even with all our imperfections and limitations. Spiritual direction nurtures emotional wholeness by inviting us to return again and again to this unconditional divine embrace.

Praying with feelings can gradually bring about emotional transformation and release. The biblical psalms are a wonderful example of this process, and it helps explain why they remain so powerful a spiritual resource. No emotion lies outside the psalms' scope. Nor is the psalmist afraid of intensity. Starting right at the heart of its honest expression, a psalm often moves from initial guilt, anger, fear, or despair to a place of gratitude and greater peace. For example, Psalm 22 begins with a plea uttered in darkness and emptiness, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The agony deepens as the psalmist tells of groaning, crying out day and night, and being scorned. Then the psalm turns to an expression of deep trust:

Yet it was you who took me from the womb;  
you kept me safe on my mother's breast.  
On you I was cast from my birth,  
and since my mother bore me  
you have been my God. (Vv. 9–10)

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Back and forth the psalms move, as disappointment and praise, fury and gratitude find expression before God and transformation in the crucible of grace. By guiding directees into such prayerful encounters, assuring them that all feelings can be brought to God, we help them plumb an emotion's power in the context of faith.

Not all emotional work acknowledges the activity of God's Spirit within our experience. A focus on the deeper dimension of emotions helps to distinguish spiritual direction from the many other helping relationships that also attend closely to feelings, often using similar techniques. Because spiritual direction rests on fundamental convictions about the transcendent dimension of reality and the religious origin and significance of emotions, it views stories of anger, fear, sadness, or joy not only as accounts of personal growth and healing but also as sacred narratives.

*Emotions are Sacred Narratives*

## 2. Emotions are not opposed to reason. In fact, they are a mode of knowing.

In response to those who contend that feelings interfere with reasoning, solid research now establishes that—on the contrary—we cannot make decisions without them. They constitute essential components of human knowing and judging. The moral philosopher Martha Nussbaum summarizes current thinking well in *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*. From her extensive research, Nussbaum concludes that emotions so influence the landscape of our mental and social lives that, when emotions are absent, judgment itself is not fully or really there (p. 44). For example, the fear, sorrow, and outrage evoked by a war or natural disaster

do not distract from the truth of such events; rather, they deepen insight into what such tragedies mean for justice, the environment, poor people, and other global concerns.

The neuroscientist Anthony Damasio supplies further support for the intelligence of emotions. In *Descartes' Error*, Damasio shows that the emotion-reason division has been misleading; emotions are forms of intelligent awareness, inner guides that tell us about the nature of our relationship to life's circumstances. To reach this conclusion, Damasio drew on experience with his patients, particularly when brain injuries had damaged the centers controlling emotions. Damasio found that when this happened, a patient lost the ability to set priorities and make decisions. Emotions are ways of evaluating events in terms of what matters; since no one thing now seemed more important than any other, how could the patient choose? These current findings from philosophy and neuroscience underscore how essential it is to include emotions in spiritual discernment.

To these insights of moral philosophy and neuroscience, we add the faith conviction that the divine spirit lives among us as the grace of connections. Emotions are borne and sustained in relationship; they indicate when our relationships are rightly ordered and when they are not. Because the sacred and the ordinary are not two separate spheres but rather dimensions of one reality, our relationships with self, others, and the universe indicate how we stand with God.

Integrating emotions into the spiritual life requires awareness of their source and impact across this whole span of relationships. The first component of an emotion arises subjectively and spontaneously. We describe these initial feelings as neither good nor bad; they just *are*. Only later are we able to understand a feeling's origins and choose whether to reduce or expand it. We may feel as if we are in love but not know if we can trust the feeling. We find anger growing in us and realize we can either fuel and vent it or try to work creatively with its energy. We are afraid without yet knowing the reason for our fear or what course of action to take. Gradually we move beyond the first awareness of a feeling to explore all the complex notes contained in its composition; in the process, we learn how to direct it wisely. How might God's Spirit be prompting me within the

feelings I have become aware of? Scripture calls attention to the fruits typical of the Spirit's work: The Spirit of God renews and transforms energy (Ps 104:30); brings life out of death (Rom 4:17); comforts those who mourn (Is 61:1-2); teaches courage and justice (Ws 8:7); brings forgiveness and reconciliation to tormented hearts (Is 4:4); pours the love of God into our hearts (Rom 5:5); and creates communities marked by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22). With honest and open prayer, we come to recognize how our fear, anger, sadness, joy, or longing relate to the promptings of God's Spirit and how the force of our emotions can be used to further God's purpose in our own lives and the wider universe.

Some questions help with this prayerful reflection: What is the feeling in me like and how do I picture it? Does my anger issue in a sense of resolve and creative direction, or is it eating away at body and spirit, alienating me from others and interfering with prayer? Am I choosing to hold tight to feelings of hurt and sorrow in spite of the grace that keeps nudging me to let go and forgive? Is fear keeping me from fully using my gifts in ministry, or should I risk moving past it? Do feelings of guilt undermine my trust in God and myself, or can I make peace with my finitude and the limits of life? Can I celebrate the joy and peace I experience this day as God's gift, believing that God wants goodness and life for me? A key text for prayer around the source and direction of emotions comes from Dt 30:19, where we are reminded that in the midst of all of creation's contrasting possibilities, God desires that we "choose life."

### 3. Naming emotions accurately and exploring their relationship to the Spirit requires patient, attentive listening.

Listening someone into speech calls for silences, pauses, and sustained attentiveness. One aspect of the complexity of emotions is that they frequently come not as single entities but rather as interwoven clusters. Most of us have had the experience of identifying an emotion only to later discover dimensions not captured in our initial naming of it. A woman I saw in spiritual direction once opened a session by telling me how furious she was with the doctors and hospital staff for not saving her

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*Mayer - protective*

father's life. But as her rage slowly ~~shattered~~, she uncovered a well of sadness and found herself sobbing at the loss of her beloved parent. The anger protected her for a time from realizing the terrible rupture that had occurred and gave her targets for her protest against it—but beneath it lay immense grief.

In addition to shorter and spontaneous feelings, there are those that endure. For example, fear of death provides the background for many attitudes and decisions. Another enduring emotion that arises from a life of prayer is a growing compassion for the suffering of the universe. Background emotions play like a symphony while we are doing other things, such as eating dinner or carrying on a conversation, and they give rise to more immediate emotions. All the emotions involve ongoing activity through which we continually evaluate new information and then act accordingly: Can I trust God to carry me through this passage from life to death? Did my brother really intend to hurt me with his comment? Can I extend compassion to a co-worker whom I dislike? Naming and exploring emotions in spiritual direction enables us to modify those that interfere with our spiritual lives and to deepen those that support it.

If we are to discern the source and direction of feelings, we must respect their language and allow them to gradually reveal their full intricacy. Many voices alternate within each of us, and we often present an emotional face to the world quite different from the one we struggle with internally. The German Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer expresses well the sometimes contradictory and confusing nature of feelings. Imprisoned for taking part in a plot to assassinate Hitler, he asks from his Tegel prison cell, "Who Am I?" Is he, Bonhoeffer wonders, the person others describe as faith-filled and friendly, calm and cheerful in conversation?

Or am I only what I know of myself, restless and longing and sick, like a bird in a cage, struggling for breath, as though hands were compressing

my throat,  
yearning for colours, for flowers, for the voices of birds,  
thirsting for words of kindness, for neighbourliness,  
trembling with anger at despotisms and petty humiliation,  
tossing in expectation of great events,  
powerlessly trembling for friends at an infinite distance,  
weary and empty at praying, at thinking, at making,  
faint, and ready to say farewell to it all?

(Bethge, pp. 347-348)



Chris Cannon

We too sometimes face the inner loneliness and emotional confusion Bonhoeffer describes, though usually in less dire circumstances.

Even when feelings become clearly available, we can find ourselves in an emotional tangle, like knitting yarn filled with knots. One of the great gifts of spiritual companionship lies in its offer of a listening heart as a person attempts to unravel emotional confusion and direct feelings to prayer and wise action. Prayerful listening constitutes, of course, the core of what we do as spiritual directors. Sometimes

we wonder if it is enough; yet many who come for spiritual direction have been listened to far too little—moving through life unseen and unheard. Being listened to allows a person to be really heard and understood, perhaps for the first time. In her memoir, *Called to Question*, Joan Chittister describes this process well: "It is being alone in my pain, my fear, the burden of my memories, that presses my face to the ground. But when one person says, 'I know,' ... 'I understand,' ... 'I can see why you feel that way,' I become whole again" (p. 103).

The very act of listening can itself bring about a shift in emotions. Jesus' encounters illustrate this. Those who meet him leave feeling seen and heard, and this liberates them. With him they can fully acknowledge that they are

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doubtful, grieving, burdened, or filled with regrets. In his presence, they find themselves safe and valued, graced in such a way that they take up life's emotional challenges with renewed strength and insight.

### **4. Bringing hidden and unacknowledged emotions to awareness frequently leads to breakthroughs on the spiritual journey.**

As human beings, we not only have feelings; we also have feelings *about* our feelings. We are ashamed of our sexual desire, guilty about our jealousy, afraid of our anger—and sometimes the feeling *about* the feeling is worse than the initial feeling itself. But we need to acknowledge both sets of feelings, or they are more likely to be expressed in inappropriate ways. Shame—the sense that there is something wrong, not just with my actions but with *me*—clings to many emotions. Listening carefully to directees' stories uncovers the messages they received about the acceptability and appropriate expression of certain emotions, which suggest some of the reasons for their struggle to integrate them into their spirituality.

Some of these reasons result from the fact that emotions are not simply internal and individual; they are communal and cultural as well. Diverse religious and cultural norms shape our emotional experience in crucial ways. For example, the Balinese people believe that sad feelings are dangerous to a person's health and weaken the life force; in times of sorrow, they try to think of happy events and remain cheerful (Nussbaum, p. 140). Restrictions based on gender likewise determine emotional expression: Anger has been considered less acceptable for women; fear or sadness suggests weakness in men. A directee of mine who was in great grief after the death of his wife

would regularly cover his face with his hat when he began to weep in my presence. It seemed unmanly and weak to cry, and he felt ashamed of his tears.

Standard wisdom calls for befriending emotions, but that is sometimes hard to do. Our natural instinct is denial or avoidance. We insist, "No, I'm not angry," although our bodies clearly signal anger's energy. Or we eat, drink, and keep busy to cover the fears that seem too painful to face. Since we want to appear at our best in spiritual direction, we may mention positive movements first. The fact that whenever I try to pray, a desire for revenge against my sister rises up and consumes my heart—this takes more courage to acknowledge. Such reluctance to reveal the darker aspects of the self is deeply human, and this highlights the immense trust people demonstrate when they do in fact bring their most vulnerable feelings to direction.

How can we as spiritual directors help foster trust that God can be found even in more negative emotions or those viewed as unacceptable? A sacred space opens such feelings to grace and discernment. Such a setting mediates the divine presence, both in the prayer experiences that occur there and in the way the director mirrors God's unconditional love. This conveys the acceptance that directees often name as the most important quality in a spiritual direction relationship: "It was the one place where I felt I could say anything, and it would be okay"; or, "I never felt judged by him." Providing such safety requires that we suspend our assumptions and biases in order to empathically enter into the directee's sacred narrative—listening fully to the beginning, the middle, and the end of his or her story with God. It also helps to have available spiritual resources that foster a healthy embrace

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## 6. Praying with the imagination and incorporating the arts into spirituality

of the full range of human feelings and that emphasize the importance of bestowing compassion and forgiveness not only on others but first of all on oneself.

### 5. Tracing emotional memory, the history of how we came to feel the way we do, often liberates a person spiritually.

Our bodies contain the ongoing emotional effects of our history with God and others. We call this *emotional memory*. You may have experienced such remembering when you encountered a religious symbol or song that stirred familiar—but forgotten—feelings of guilt or gratitude, consolation or aversion. Perhaps you hear God called *Lord and judge* and it revives feelings of unworthiness and fear. Or you attend a funeral and it evokes tears for your own past losses. I recently heard the hymn “O Mary, we crown thee with blossoms today.” Long overlooked layers of my spiritual life rose up and returned to me. I recalled my early devotion to Mary and remembered how grounding and inspiring the rituals in her honor were during difficult childhood days. Emotional memory also shows itself in how kindly or harshly we act toward ourselves—for example, with constant self-criticism or with empathy. These attitudes reveal and repeat how we were treated earlier by significant others.

Emotional memory opens many chapters of a spiritual narrative, offering both understanding and a chance to strengthen or revise past patterns. A woman I saw for spiritual direction once remarked casually during a session that she had been compared with her younger sister, who had died many years ago at the young age of forty-two. That suddenly evoked a memory of how much her sister had suffered, especially as she was dying. Much grief arose, and she declared through pursed lips: “I lay on the bed holding my sister, and I hated God. How could he ask her to suffer more after all she had already been through? What crass unfairness!” We both sat in silence for some moments, struck by how powerful the

memory was, how strongly it inhabited her entire body. The woman then resumed the narrative. “I don’t feel that way toward God now,” she said, and she went on to talk about how this shift in her relationship with God came about.

As was the case with this woman, emotional memories sometimes carry negative tones. Feelings such as resistance or guilt arise because of the way images of God or religious practices and objects were first encountered. If past prayer times have been difficult or dry, the thought of returning to them may evoke helplessness or hopelessness. Directees need help with clarifying how these past negative events are impacting their present journey. However, memories also arise as feelings of gratitude for past blessings and fruitful decisions. In *An Interrupted Life*, Hillesum says of such remembrance: “My impressions are scattered like glittering stars on the dark velvet of my memory” (p. 240). She describes her gratitude to God as a flame bursting to life within her as she recalls all the friendship and the people she has known during the past year. Though she is physically sick, anemic, and bedridden, these emotional memories enable her to pray in thanksgiving: “I rejoice and exult time and again, oh God: I am grateful to You for having given me this life” (p. 241).

The director’s role is not to probe for such emotional memories, like a physician searching for signs of a disease; it is to be ready, and to sense a ripeness. The feelings usually arise of themselves when a person is strong enough to let them come. Then a director becomes witness and companion, a support for the person exploring her or his present graced meaning. It is also helpful to suggest spiritual resources that offer fresh perspectives on this emotional history or that give voice to gratitude for graces received. Spiritual memoirs such as Trudelle Thomas’ *Spirituality in the Mother Zone* and Robert Barnes’ *The Good Doctor Is Naked* are especially useful in suggesting redemptive possibilities.

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## 6. Praying with the imagination and incorporating the arts into spirituality lead to insight and conversion.

The Bible underscores the vital role the imagination plays in prayer and conversion. Filled with emotionally charged stories, scripture addresses us at the deep faith levels where the seeds of all action dwell. Its stories awaken insight in and through the emotions they engender. When we enter the story of the woman with the flow of blood (Lk 8:43–48) or the parable of the ten bridesmaids (Mt 25:1–13), we participate in the frustration, regret, gratitude, and hope found there and emerge with our own feelings conformed more closely to the Gospel. By suggesting such prayer forms to directees, we help them open to the fresh energies released and nourished by the imagination. The same spiritual power resides in the imaginative treasures of many religious traditions: Islamic poetry, Jewish and Zen tales, and the myths of indigenous peoples. Paintings, such as van Gogh's *Starry Night*, also evoke religious emotion, the sense that the world is alive with God's presence.

Works of the imagination—poetry, dance, music, the visual arts—take us to specific and individual aspects of creation and allow us to find there the splendor and mystery of the divine. We then begin to view all the details of the universe through the lens of that mystery, to live in a spirit of contemplative wonder. My husband, Tom, has always loved the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins and is given to reciting stanzas of it without notice. Upon hearing a bird's call, he may break into lines from Hopkins' poem "Spring": "and thrush / Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring / The ear, it strikes like lightnings to hear him sing" (Gardner, p. 28). Hopkins sought to reveal the inscape of concrete things, the inner pattern and unity that give them meaning. Fruits of the imagination, like Hopkins' poetry, teach us how to see and feel; they shape and fill our senses.

Revelation occurs first on the level of the imagination, and so does our initial response of faith. Some who come to us for spiritual direction find God more fully through intellect than imagination. While affirming their primary spiritual path, we can encourage them to explore other, more bodily avenues to God as well. For others, spiritual insights arrive initially as a dense

emotional field that lacks clarity. They may regard themselves as less spiritual than persons who can more immediately articulate their spiritual experiences, and they need encouragement to stay present while this emotional energy clarifies. Gradually they will discover the images concealed in the emotions and the thoughts that arise from an image. For example, after one of my directees gave birth to her first child, she reported that she would simply start to weep quietly as she began her prayer time. She was not depressed, and she believed this emotion had deeper roots than fatigue stemming from a new routine and sleepless nights. She felt more deeply touched than sad. As we stayed with the experience, she realized that what moved her so, filling her with the wonder and gratitude that found expression in tears, was an image that had now displaced her other familiar religious symbols—the image of herself as mother with child, the miracle of her own fruitful body incarnating the graciousness of the Mother God.

Religious feeling often stretches and transcends the limits of ordinary language; it must speak of the ineffable in symbol and paradox. Teresa of Avila prayed that she might find a way to describe her pilgrimage to the God who dwells at the center of the self. Then she discovered a basis from which to begin: "It is that we consider our soul to be like a castle made entirely out of a diamond or of very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in heaven there are many dwelling places" (Kavanaugh and Rodriguez, p. 35). The castle offered Teresa the image of wholeness for which she searched; along with the castle, other images emerged—water, serpents, the butterfly. Her experiences of union could be captured only in such images.

The search for adequate words also gives rise to apparent contradiction and obscurity—darkness that is light, absence that is presence, emptiness that is fullness. In his poem "The Canticle of the Void," Paul Murray repeatedly turns to the imaginative language of the metaphor "singing silence" to suggest the apparent absence of God that is in actuality the divine presence in this world.

Mine is the voice  
that sings out of the voiceless  
night, that rises

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we may reflect the scope of the spiritual life as only as the private life that Christians shared by tradition, e.g., marriage, work, or global events like music out of the root of the dark thorn, out of the lucid throat of the fountain. (Culbertson, pp. 25–27)

When we are prayerfully attentive to our emotional experiences, we will also recognize when the person we are serving has spiritual direction. Emotional experiences beyond our comfort zone allow us to see that they may need attention. The edges of our helping relationships are toward recognition of our limitations, together both general and particular.

directors we may not be prepared to address when the intended disruption in a person's life. We also see this is the kind of degree of change that director is creating, we may need to re

The feelings that accompany an experience of union with God or of oneness with all creation require language that both reveals and conceals, speech that points to inexpressible depth and mystery. This is the language of the imagination, so intrinsic to spirituality and spiritual direction.

## 7. Spiritual directors need to pay prayerful attention to their own emotional experience, inside and outside the time of direction.

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We can hardly ask our directees to do what we are unwilling to do ourselves. Mirroring a healthy way of dealing with feelings requires that we are doing our own emotional work. Supervision is a great help here, as is seeking therapy for ourselves when that is indicated.

Our own prayer teaches us the language and intricacy of the emotional life. When I have named my own envy or anger and observed how it plays out in my life, I can more fully hear it in the story of another. Empathy and understanding are easier, since it is hard to feel impatient or judgmental about the limitations of others once we have faced our own. Such honesty regarding our emotions allows us to genuinely love our directees. This love is then free and appropriate, empathic and faithful. We are better prepared to follow the first norm of all helping relationships: Do no harm.

As spiritual directors, we might ask ourselves not only what feelings recur in sessions but also what emotions we do not hear from our directees and why this might be so. It is usually when I am praying for my directees, or bringing a session to prayer because I have some unease about how it has gone, that I am graced with insight into what emotions I may have missed or received less well than I wish I had. There are many reasons why persons hide emotions from others. Religious teaching has convinced us that it is not okay to feel certain ways. And as directors, we may give subtle—or not so subtle—indicators that some feelings are unacceptable. Perhaps the energy of anger frightens us. Or we feel judgment about a person's strong sexual passion. We may not be able to bear sadness or grief in another without trying to fix it.

Or we may restrict the scope of the spiritual life so exclusively to the interior life that emotions stirred by friendships, marriage, work, or global events seem out of place and do not get inserted into the conversation.

When we are prayerfully attentive to our own emotional experience, we will also recognize when the person we are seeing for spiritual direction brings emotional experience beyond our comfort or competence, an indication that they may need other forms of help. The ethics of any helping relationship commit us to an honest recognition of our limitations as well as our strengths, both personal and professional. As spiritual directors, we may not be prepared to address severe emotional disruption in a person's life. When we recognize that this is the kind or degree of emotional distress a directee is reporting, we may need to refer the person to someone else. For example, sadness that persists over time, darkening not only one's prayer but also all of life, calls for further assessment. Because many spiritual traditions have identified suffering with spiritual advancement, it is especially important not to simply assume depression is a cross the person should bear.

Anger, fear, sadness, or a sense of euphoria that seriously disrupts a person's life in an ongoing way usually calls for the help of a therapist as well as a spiritual director. When in doubt, it is important to seek consultation. One can usually continue with spiritual direction to explore the spiritual dimension of issues such as the abuse, depression, or addiction that often fuels these emotions. A director may find, for example, that the rage a woman continues to carry as a result of childhood abuse or domestic violence calls for therapy. But the spiritual direction works in concert with that therapy, providing a space for exploring how such rage includes God and the woman's spiritual life.

This effort to work creatively with the emotions in spiritual direction affirms the hope and joy found in embracing the full range of human experience. My seven guiding principles—as well as others you may want to add—seek to honor the Spirit's presence in all the feelings that guide us toward greater love of God. As spiritual directors, we make our way tentatively through this complex emotional terrain, trusting that the spiritual and emotional realms that may now be partial and fragmented will gradually converge more

and more fully until grace makes them one in an all-encompassing Love. ■

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