



Presence: the Bridge between Being Asleep and Awakening Awareness

by Matthew Johnson

Before I dive into the topic of companioning those who describe a feeling of asleep to their own lives, it is important to name that being a spiritual companion can happen in both formal and informal settings. Throughout the Wayfaring Companions training, we discuss both because we may each be called to serve as a spiritual companion along the spectrum of informal and formal companioning.

Informal spiritual companioning can happen in the midst of any conversation. When I'm talking with someone and they say something that shimmers in my awareness, I can shift to a compassionate listening posture, allowing the focus to remain on the person who is talking. I might ask questions or offer reflection to allow the one talking to remain present and move deeper with their experience. I step aside in this way because I know there is wisdom within them which may be brought to light.

Of course, you don't have to be trained to provide such listening, it can and does happen by those who are naturally discerning and good listeners. However, our training helps people to strengthen their gifts and increase their sensitivity to such moments.

Now, let us return to formal spiritual companioning, which is sometimes called spiritual direction. These conversations begin with an expectation of roles; one person comes as the companion (or director), while the other comes as the traveler (or directee). Both enter with some level of hope that the Divine Mystery is present and speaking into the conversation. With such intentionality, the conversation can be very transformative. Additionally, some travelers will meet regularly with the same spiritual director for many years, which allows for a deep knowing of the directee's history. The story below comes from a formal spiritual direction relationship.

Part of the work of companioning others is asking questions that clarify what the directee is experiencing in their spiritual lives. I have never had a directee say that they feel absent from their own life, and yet I have heard many describe symptoms which ultimately point to this feeling of absence. Such symptoms may include distraction, numbing, fantasizing, daydreaming, procrastinating, forgetting, avoiding, or dwelling in the future or the past.

Presence

Symptom of Being Asleep: I am struggling to be present to the internal and external reality of life.

Sign of Awakening Awareness: I practice noticing and developing consciousness.

When I hear directees describing these experiences, my first response is one of compassion. Oh how I can relate! From this place of compassion I want to offer a safe space. This is a space where the directee, in talking with me, can be free from shame in order to look more closely at what is really happening. This is the first step of Presence. Our judgment-free conversation opens up space to explore various aspects of life and how they connect to life-giving practices, such as prayer, quiet time, meditation practices, even hobbies. As a Companion, I am seeking to understand where they are encountering the Holy Spirit, and how they might return to that place.

I once spoke with a directee* who described feeling exhausted from an intense work schedule. The exhaustion resulted in a pattern of ending the workday by binge watching television. She felt guilty for this habit because she was absent from her young family. I asked her to describe any moments when she felt Present. Her face lit up as she described her family gathered at the kitchen table on Sunday afternoon reflecting on their day. These conversations both centered and energized her, drawing her closer to God as well as her family. As the conversation continued it occurred to me that the prayer of Examen might be a helpful practice for her and her young family to do together at the end of the day. She loved the idea and immediately implemented it.

As the years have passed, this simple practice of reflecting on the day has been a way for her to be more present to herself, her family, and God. Periodically, she mentions stories to me of the family gathered at the table, connecting with and caring for one another, sharing both highlights and struggles, laughter and tears. The changes in her life have been beautiful to witness as she has lived more fully into Presence.

*the specifics of this conversation have been changed to maintain confidentiality.



If you'd like to enter into these kinds of conversations with a spiritual companion, [contact us](#). And if you feel led to companion others [contact us](#) to learn more about our Spiritual Companionship Introduction Course.

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