

A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE FOR DEEP LISTENERS — WRITING FROM ANOTHER'S POINT OF VIEW

BY HAVIVA NER-DAVID

I am a rabbi. I run a mikveh (ritual immersion pool) on the kibbutz where I live in Galilee, officiating and creating personalized immersion ceremonies and facilitating group workshops. I am also a spiritual companion and writer. And I see all these roles as interconnected.

I grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home but slowly began to expand my horizons. The first step was leaving Orthodoxy and calling myself a post-denominational rabbi, because I realized that I am not in favor of denominational delineation within Judaism. I see it as limiting rather than expanding, separating rather than connecting. I think I was always attracted to what was considered “other” in the narrow environment in which I was raised.

But soon even the label “Jewish” felt too confining. I was interested in exploring other faiths and paths to the divine. So, I began studying for interfaith ordination at the One Spirit Interfaith-Interspiritual Seminary. What a liberating and eye-opening experience that was for me. And yet, I had more growing to do.

When I was exposed to spiritual companionship during my ministry studies, I knew I had found a calling. The act of holding another in non-judgment, of putting one’s own personal story aside while listening with sacred intention to another, was what I had been longing for in my attraction to spiritual work. Yet, I had never heard of it before. Jewish clergy were only just beginning to discover spiritual direction at that time.

While studying for certification in spiritual companionship, I joined a Palestinian-Jewish narrative-sharing group in which we hear one another’s life stories around the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The idea is to not only listen, but to listen in non-judgment. To witness and be present, to hold space for the other, without letting our own stories, thoughts, or national narratives, get in the way.

Then, after hearing the speaker’s story, we ask open questions and share how their story touched us, but without making it about us or starting a debate. It is a transformative process which I consider directly connected to my work as a spiritual companion. It

(continued on page 16)

(continued from page 15)

feels very much like spiritual companionship, only within a group.

As I began to hear and hold these stories, a desire grew within me to share them and this transformative experience with others. And thus, my novel, [Hope Valley](#) was conceived.

The book tells the story of the unexpected friendship between a Jewish-Israeli woman, Tikvah, and a Palestinian-Israeli woman, Rabia (or Ruby). The two women meet in the Galilean valley that divides Tikvah's moshav from Ruby's village. While at first there is suspicion and resentment between the two women, they slowly not only become friends, but, in recognizing each other's narratives and pain, they end up forming a deep bond that surpasses societal divides.

In the first drafts, the manuscript was written all from the point of view of Tikvah. That is the story I felt most comfortable telling. But something was missing. I was in the process of figuring out the best way to tell this story, and all along, I think I knew, that the best way to make the story come alive would be to try stepping into Ruby's shoes. I have no doubt that immersing myself in the skills

of spiritual companionship enabled me to write from Ruby's viewpoint. We sit with another -- simply being present for them without being trapped in our own thoughts -- acting as a spiritual mirror to their souls, a midwife to their spiritual evolution, a safe space for them to be completely themselves without worrying about offending or being judged. In so doing, we liberate ourselves as well.

Letting go of our own story, or at least setting it aside for the duration of a companionship session, helps us connect more to our own souls, because we must learn to separate ourselves from the person sitting in front of us. And, ironically, in so doing, we are able to connect to them more deeply. We can see them not from our own limited perspective, but, rather, from a place that is closer to seeing them through divine eyes.

The exercise of writing this novel parallels the spiritual companionship relationship. While writing from Tikvah's point of view, I was on some level exploring my own inner landscape, which we must do before sitting with another. And while writing from Ruby's point of view, I was exploring that of someone whose life experiences are so different from mine that it required sacred listening to the other in order to do so.

(continued on page 17)

"A BRAVE AND WONDERFUL BOOK!" - ROSHI JOAN HALIFAX

"A LUMINOUS GUIDE FOR COMPANIONS" - MIRABAI STARR

REFLECTIONS ON AWAKENING & MATURITY FOR SPIRITUAL COMPANIONS

A Zen Master and Quaker, a spiritual companion/director and psychotherapist, Genjo is above all, a wisdom teacher. He has lived the arc of suffering, awakening and maturity that he writes about in this book.

Spiritual companions, spiritual directors, and all interested in a life of spirit, will benefit from reading Genjo's chronicle of breaking apart and growing, healing and becoming whole.



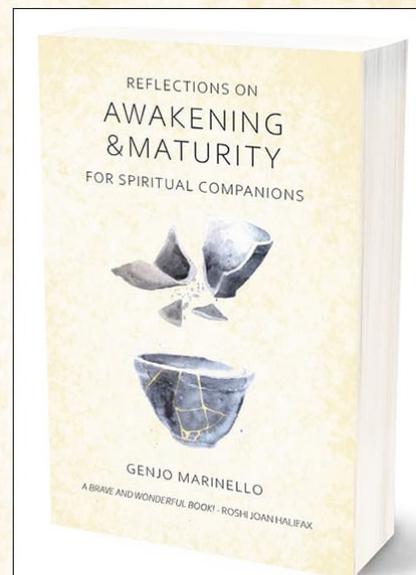
GENJO MARINELLO

\$29.95

REGULAR PRICE

\$17.45 OR LESS

SDI MEMBERS



SDI PRESS
SDICOMPANIONS.ORG

(continued from page 16)

What was even more surprising, however, about the process of writing this novel, was the way it enhanced my spiritual companionship practice as well. The act of being able to switch points of view requires the kind of removal of self and making space for the divine that our work as spiritual companions also asks us to do.

I know not everyone is a writer or even enjoys writing, but for those who feel inclined in that direction (not necessarily for publication, but even just as an exercise) I invite you to consider writing from another's point of view as a spiritual practice. Often, when we think about writing as a spiritual practice, we think of journaling our innermost thoughts and feelings. What I am suggesting is adding to that practice another step, which is to try writing from another's point of view – especially someone with whom you are having a conflict or even just to whom you are having trouble relating.

For me, this act has had such a profound effect that Ruby's character lives inside of me to this day. Not only do I carry her around in my mind and heart, but my whole being has been generally expanded

so that when I sit with another, that muscle of being able to step into another's shoes is in great shape, ready to do its holy work.



Haviva Ner-David is a writer and post-denominational interspiritual rabbi. In addition to her rabbinic ordination, she was ordained and certified as a spiritual companion at the One Spirit Interfaith-Interspiritual Seminary in New York.

Haviva is the founding rabbi of Shmaya: A Mikveh for Mind, Body and Soul, where she officiates full body water immersion ceremonies, facilitates workshops, and helps clients prepare personalized immersion rituals. She also has a spiritual companionship practice for both individuals and couples, with a specialty in dreamwork. Haviva is the author of two published spiritual journey memoirs. Hope Valley is her debut novel. It is available on Amazon [here](#). Haviva lives in northern Israel, with her life partner, Jacob, and their seven children (six biological and one adopted), dog and cat. She also lives with FSHD, a degenerative genetic muscular disease that has been one her greatest teachers.

St Brigid
Howard Thurman
Julian of Norwich
Evelyn Underhill
John O'Donohue
Teresa of Avila
and Others

Christian Mystics

and
Spiritual Companionship

Wisdom Teaching for Those Who Hold Space

4-part Series
starts September 9, 2021
Presenter: Carl McColman

SDI WEBINAR