

voice, and discern how God's providence might be unfolding within the seeker's own life.



How Do I Think about My Particular Needs?

In looking to distinguish among different therapeutic and spiritual approaches, the following might be helpful:

- *If you are interested in learning about Jewish beliefs, observances, and texts, you are seeking religious education.*
- *If you want to alleviate your anxieties and learn how to understand and deal with their causes, you are seeking psychotherapy.*
- *If you want insight into how the wisdom and archetypes of Jewish tradition might help you understand life and respond to your problems, you are seeking pastoral counseling.*
- *If you wish to deepen your relationship with God so that you can recognize how God's spirit might be summoning you and moving in your life, you are seeking spiritual direction.*

These forms of learning and counsel are not mutually exclusive. Many people of faith study and seek out their clergy for pastoral counseling when the need arises. Seekers participating in spiritual direction may also be in ongoing therapy, wishing to understand and relieve their problems while trying to discern if there is a transcendent meaning to their experiences.

Is Spiritual Direction Right for Me?

To answer this question, consider:

- *Am I sensing a lack of spiritual meaning in my life, or is something else missing?*
- *Do I have unresolved psychological issues to address separately with a therapist before or concurrently with entering into spiritual direction?*
- *If my life seems turbulent, will spiritual direction help at this time, or might pastoral counseling better assist me to face my concerns in a religious context?*

If we decide to pursue spiritual direction, consult more than one potential guide. It is important that we feel safe and understood, that we can entrust our fears and hopes and our longing for God to the relationship. Once we have selected a director, start with a three-month trial period of biweekly or monthly meetings, and then should be evaluate if both wish to continue.

Consider carefully whether we are ready for the challenges and the benefits that spiritual direction might bring. The task of discerning God's call in our life is a serious, ongoing, and sometimes unsettling process. However, it can often prove wondrous and transformative, revealing the divine possibilities inherent in even the simple occurrences of everyday life.

Finding Help: Psychotherapy, Pastoral Counseling and Spiritual Direction

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“Where am I?”

It's a question haunts many of us. We have our routines; our lives unfold as we've planned them. Then, a transforming event, a doubt, or a crisis causes us to stop and reflect. Previously held beliefs no longer suffice. We seek to locate our position along this journey called life, wondering, “Where am I?”

What Type of Counsel Should I Seek?

In this therapeutic age, numerous options are available for those seeking guidance.

Psychotherapy: Most forms of psychotherapy help the client gain a stronger sense of self and adjust to the dynamics of regular living. Faced with unresolved childhood or family issues, clients seek assistance from trained, certified therapists to explore the reasons for their obsessions, compulsions, depression, or fears. The objective is to help the patient resolve problems and achieve a more healthy integration into society.

Pastoral Counseling: Pastoral counseling shares many features with psychotherapy. Just as the therapist is trained and certified, the pastoral counselor is academically prepared either as an ordained clergy member or as a specially trained layperson. Both therapy and pastoral counseling help people adjust to life's

challenges, and both focus on resolving problems, particularly in the short run.

Major differences, however, exist between therapy and pastoral counseling. While spiritual experience and transcendence are taken seriously in pastoral counseling and in transpersonal psychology, several schools of psychological thought dismiss them as fanciful or delusional. While therapy primarily focuses on the individual's development, pastoral counseling seeks to connect the individual to the traditions and practices of a faith community for wisdom, celebration, and comfort. Among its main goals, psychotherapy seeks to alleviate the suffering that interferes with one's happiness and fulfillment in love and work. Pastoral counseling also seeks to allay distress but views suffering as inherent to our human condition, providing opportunities to grow in faith, sustain hope, and find comfort.

Spiritual Direction: Spiritual direction discerns our unfolding relationship with God. It is a relationship through which a guide helps a seeker perceive how the Source of Life might be calling the seeker to greater meaning and growth, to help the seeker appreciate the divine that underlies and transcends the everyday. It is about asking questions like these:

- *Where is God in your longing? Your success? Your pain?*
- *What new realms of spiritual insight are being revealed through your relationships? Your work?*
- *Where might you sense the presence of the One inherent within multiple roles and conflicting demands of your life?*
- *Who are you now, and who are you being called to become?*

After reflection, the seeker might see God's presence in someone who reached out or in the experience of renewed fortitude. A low time might even become a springboard to

further growth or greater empathy. The shattering of our circumstances, our self-image, or even our understanding of God may actually be part of a sacred process. The guide's role is to help seekers discern their lives' spiritual direction through prayer, meditation, study of sacred texts, and reflection on the unfolding patterns of their everyday existence.

A guide might be ordained or might have completed a training program in spiritual direction. However, the guide's main qualification is to be receptive and to help nurture intimacy between the seeker and God.



Is Spiritual Direction Jewish?

Because normative Judaism emphasizes Torah study and observing *mitzvot*, many Jews feel uncomfortable with the idea that we can have an unmediated, personal relationship with God. However, Psalm 40 speaks of coming before God with a scroll of our experiences inscribed upon us. The Talmud (*Mo'ed Qatan* 14b) depicts a heavenly voice declaring each day who should marry whom and who should undertake which commercial transactions. Medieval Jewish philosophers wrote extensively about *hashgahah pratit*, individual providence, while Jewish mystics discussed how each of our souls is rooted in one of the ten manifestations (*sefirot*) of God's personality. Depending on the imagery employed, a spiritual director will help the seeker to read the seeker's own Torah within, listen more attentively for the heavenly