

A Guide to Spiritual Companionship

A spiritual companion is much like a psychologist for the soul, there to support you on your spiritual path.

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A bewildering array of options exists for those seeking spiritual guidance. An online search can turn up varied terms, including *spiritual director*, *spiritual advisor*, *spiritual companionship*, and *spiritual guide*.

While it's easy to become overwhelmed, Reverend Seifu Anil Singh-Molares sees these terms as often interchangeable. He is the executive director of the 31-year-old nonprofit organization [Spiritual Directors International](#) (SDI), which he describes as “dedicated to the practice of spiritual companionship and having an authentic spiritual companionship.”

At the same time, the term *spiritual companionship* is becoming more popular. Singh-Molares says it better fits what seekers are looking for, is more inclusive, and does a better job of reflecting the needs of SDI's 7,000 paid members, who are trending toward being spiritually independent, spiritually fluid, or spiritual but not religious.

“These are the fastest-growing people—people who have a strong sense of spirituality but are suspicious of established religion because of a lot of scandals and issues of predatory behavior by priests,” adds Singh-Molares.

A spiritual advisor, spiritual companion, or spiritual director, he says, is “a psychologist for the soul. People who help you find however you

might define it—divinity, universe, God, Brahman, spiritual independence, nature and flowers, etc.” But a title like spiritual director “suggests a power imbalance, where someone’s telling you what to do.” The terminology, he says, “comes principally through the Catholic Church. But over the last 50 years, it’s been adopted more broadly outside of Catholicism and Christianity.”

[Also read: [*“How Religion and Spirituality Affect Your Health”*](#)]

SDI’s members, he says, “are Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Muslims, Wiccans, Neo-pagans, psychologists, lawyers. It’s a pretty wide gamut.” Most are not ordained. It’s important to note that spiritual companions might come from a specific spiritual orientation, but that does not necessarily mean they can only speak from that background.

Singh-Molares says, “I am a Zen Priest and I’m a spiritual companion and these two things are not the same. For instance, I’m a Zen Buddhist but raised Catholic, and I speak multiple religious languages. I have clients who are conservative Catholic and Buddhist, and several who are spiritual but not religious. I can still help them because I’m not here to impose my opinions, but to support them. ... I draw on all of these modalities.”

While he agrees that anyone can offer spiritual advice or support, the difference between a spiritual companion and a friend is the difference between a professional and an amateur. “It’s not just going to the bar and talking over a couple of drinks. People have training and are committed to the calling.”

The difference between a spiritual companion and psychologist is that while both can help individuals with mental health issues, a spiritual companion’s sole objective is to support you on your spiritual path. Issues like trauma, depression, and anxiety might be obstacles on that [path](#), but they are not the primary reason why someone is seeking a companion in the first place.

[Also read: [*“Buddies on a Spiritual Path”*](#)]

The challenging part is to sift through potential providers online without the safety net of certification requirements or a governing body that recognizes spiritual companions. SDI itself has had an ongoing debate whether to have a certifying body, but currently there is no certification process to be an SDI member. Morales explains, “There is great difficulty certifying outside the Western tradition. If you’re indigenous

to your particular tribe, how would we certify you?” Instead, he recommends individuals do their due diligence to make sure spiritual companions are well trained. “Make sure the person doesn’t proselytize and is trying to help you find your own way.” Singh-Molares adds:

- A good companion respects that you have your own **unique path** and helps you figure out what your spirituality is.
- Most companions will do a free 20-minute session to see if they’re a good match.
- Check references and always check educational backgrounds.

All spiritual companions, regardless of faith traditions or spiritual orientation, should embody qualities like being a deep listener, being a lifelong learner, and being accountable, ethical, and compassionate.

Despite the challenges of finding a spiritual director, advisor, guide, or companion, Singh-Molares says, “We have experienced since March an unprecedented surge because we’re all cooped up at home. ... From April through June we had to triple our offerings to try to meet the demand because of COVID, the political divide in this country, and race and privilege issues. There is a lot of tension in society. That drives people on an exploration for deeper meaning.”

To help you decipher whether you might benefit from a spiritual companion, Singh-Molares offers this. “Are you asking yourself the following **questions**: What am I doing here? What is the purpose of my life? Is there a deeper purpose? And if you’re doing a bunch of research on the Internet and still feel lost, maybe you need someone who has training in this kind of path in finding your way through all of these metaphysical questions. Someone who can reorient you. Someone who can help with life or death questions. Someone to help you with your own solutions.”