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From My Chair: An Understanding of Spiritual Abuse, Trauma, and Well-Being as a Spiritual Companion  
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## Spiritual Direction and Twelve-Step Sponsorship

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*The two greatest needs of every human being who ever lived are the need to love and be loved and the need for acceptance and belonging.* —Earnie Larsen (Morgan and Jordan, 159)

If you search online for “addiction and spirituality,” you will get 12.4 million hits. If you search for “AA sponsorship and spiritual direction,” you will get 414,000 hits. So, you would think that the literature comparing twelve-step sponsorship and spiritual direction would be robust. It is not. Few essays address the similarities and differences between the role of the spiritual director and the role of a twelve-step sponsor. Among those that did, none that I read were thorough or specific. (I confess that I did not look at all 414,000 hits.)

Many writers have spent considerable time exploring and explaining the distinctions between therapists, pastoral counselors, and spiritual directors. These distinctions matter, both to the practitioner and to the client or spiritual directee.

However, those discussions did not address the particulars of twelve-step sponsorship and spiritual direction. Because twelve-step programs are professedly spiritual, but not religious, many twelve-step participants seek guidance from clergy or spiritual directors. This article will:

1. Help spiritual directors to understand what kind of help and support their twelve-step directees are getting from their sponsors and help sponsors know what spiritual direction offers.
2. Encourage twelve-step participants to seek spiritual direction as a tool for building a whole-hearted program.
3. Help spiritual directors to steer clear of addiction counseling and to refer directees to appropriate help. Also, to recognize that practicing addicts, still in their addiction, are not good candidates for

spiritual direction, as is the case with any person suffering with untreated mental health issues.

### Introduction

In a comprehensive and multidisciplinary collection of essays entitled *Addiction and Spirituality: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, coeditor and contributor Oliver J. Morgan states:

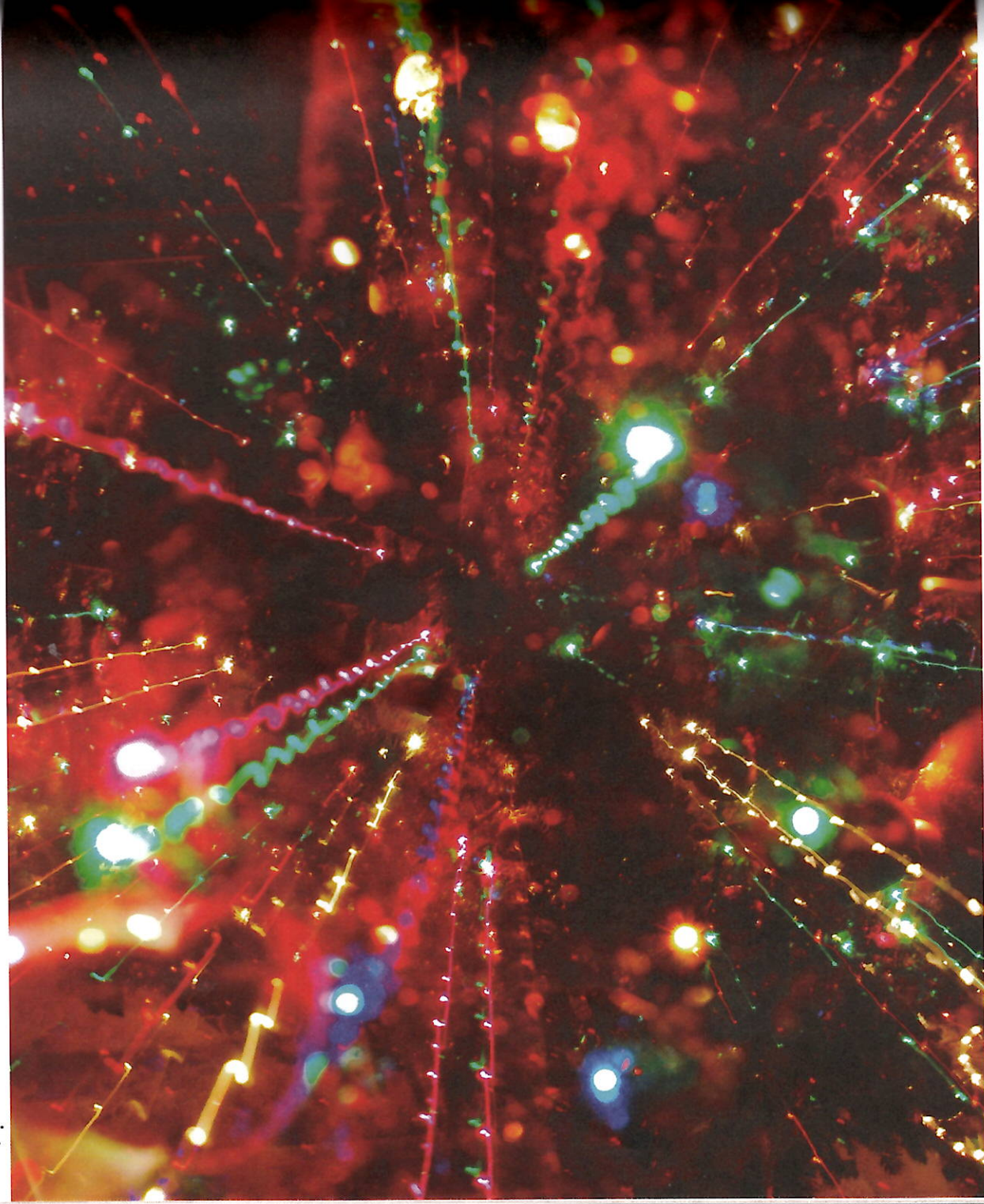
In the field of treatment, the development of the Minnesota Model, a comprehensive and multidisciplinary program geared toward holistic care, personal dignity, and spiritual growth, allowed for the application of growing scientific and clinical knowledge to the process of helping alcoholics and addicts. (7)

However, the notion of a “spiritual” component was, and continues to be, “the most controversial and most misunderstood” element in AA’s understanding of illness and recovery.” (9)

Another of the book’s contributors, Robert H. Albers, writes, “Setting up religion and spirituality as two unrelated and dissimilar entities has resulted in a disservice to both” (140).

Twenty-five years after the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous, Howard Clinebell, an ordained United Methodist clergyperson and seminary professor of pastoral counseling, began the intersection of spirituality and addiction treatment, which has resulted in fertile ground for discussion, disagreement, and, luckily, growth among those seeking recovery from a staggeringly diverse array of compulsions and addictions. (There are reputed to be over 250 “anonymous” groups using adaptations of the twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous to address various kinds of life-sapping behavioral diseases. There is no way to verify this.)

Soon, medical doctors, mental health professionals, theologians, pastoral counselors, and twelve-step practitioners began to form associations and write professional books and monographs reflecting their growing understanding of the mysteries of addiction and recovery. In



“Speed of Light” — Carlos Miguel Ortiz

the intervening decades, little has caused more disagreement than the intersection of spirituality with addiction treatment. This article will address one narrow aspect of that conversation: the similarities and differences between twelve-step sponsors and spiritual directors.

### Core Characteristics of the Relationship


*People who gathered in meeting rooms in every town, seeking solutions to their chaotic lives and engaging in a process that is,*

*in many ways, a form of group spiritual direction. (Stockton)*

*The members of Al Anon participate in a form of spiritual companionship known as “sponsorship” that closely resembles spiritual direction as practiced within established Christian faith traditions. (Stockton)*

### Goal of an Improved Spiritual Life as “the Answer”

There’s an apocryphal story about the newish twelve-stepper who said to his sponsor, “I think I’m ready to start on the spiritual part of this program.” The sponsor replied,



the discomfort of dry seasons, to the lack of “answers,” and to the necessity of constant attention to our spiritual life.

### Basic Parameters and Ethical Guidelines

#### Reciprocity

Sponsorship and spiritual direction have some similar parameters, but ethical guidelines are very different. Both relationships are, in some senses, a “professional” relationship, in that the goal is not the development of friendship or the sharing of intimacy. While deep caring and friendships surely develop, especially in sponsorship where boundaries are more porous and contact can be daily, the first order of business in the relationship is the well-being of the sponsored person or directee.

If the well-being of the sponsored person or spiritual directee is going to be foremost in the relationship, then the sponsor or spiritual director must submit to some self-imposed limitations. Eventually, sponsorship in a twelve-step program can become very mutual, and some people even talk about partners “sponsoring one another.” Such a relationship generally does not happen in spiritual direction.

“Junior/senior partner” might be a way to describe sponsorship. Not reciprocal, but mutually beneficial. It is made clear from the beginning of the twelve-step program that maintaining recovery depends on one’s willingness to be of service to others, especially through sponsorship. In addition, there is the admonishment that “you cannot transmit something you haven’t got” (*Alcoholics Anonymous: The Big Book*, 164).

While the twelve-step sponsor is not a professional (there are no “training programs” for twelve-step sponsorship), there is literature as well as informal guidelines, or “oral wisdom.” From time to time a “sponsorship workshop” may be offered, but it is not an official twelve-step program, and there are no program-wide instructions for such a workshop. The local reputation of the individual providing the workshop is the only “certifying” factor.

Twelve-step oral wisdom generally provides some guidelines: one chooses a sponsor who “has what you want,” is sober/clean/abstinent, and has a sponsor of his own. The basic job of the sponsor is to guide the

sponsored person through the work of the twelve steps in whatever way that sponsor was guided himself. There is more than one way to work through this; most of the information was informally passed on, and all of it was based on Chapters 5–7 of *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Big Book*.

“Junior/senior partner” may also be a good metaphor for spiritual direction, but most of the literature seems to avoid using hierarchical language. There is a sense that the spiritual director has more experience (like a twelve-step sponsor) and accompanies the spiritual directee on the path (like a twelve-step sponsor). The context of the spiritual direction conversation, while much less “instructional,” does convey a kind of “professionalism” not expected, or even desired, in twelve-step sponsorship.

It is important to note that the spiritual director/directee connection is not like a boss/employee relationship. However, there is a fairly instructional role for the twelve-step sponsor. AA has a “plan,” a “program” that is outlined in the twelve-step literature and is the basis for the foundation of the relationship. While most participants continue to have a sponsor after they have completed the twelve steps the first time through, the basic role of the sponsor is most critical in the introduction of the program.

### The God Thing

*Though open to all faiths, Al Anon has a Protestant Christian heritage that grounds its theory and practice in the concepts of surrender, humility, relationship with others in community, and a personal relationship with a Higher Power. (Stockton)*

*In addition to social support, remembering negative consequences, renewed honesty in living, and having a desire for health, these persons described a spiritual component and “accepting help from a higher power” as essential to their recovery. (Morgan and Jordan, 17)*

Both twelve-step sponsorship and spiritual direction have a “higher authority” as central to their work. For the twelve-step sponsor, the higher authority for the healing process is *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Big Book* and other workbooks provided by particular twelve-step groups within the World Service Organization. In spiritual direc-



tion, the “higher authority” for the process is God as spiritual director. This is a subtle distinction.

Of course, God is the “higher power” in twelve-step programs. But the “authority” for the group is the program literature, which is very specific about the need for a “higher power,” but it offers no further guidance as to what that higher power may be (except that in group decision making, the “higher power” expresses itself through the “group conscience”).

In spiritual direction, the director intentionally avoids giving “instruction” and seeks to discover, with the directee, what “instruction” may be coming from God. For this reason, much spiritual direction literature refers to God as the “real spiritual director.”

The twelve-step process requires recovering addicts to think theologically, that is, to come to their own understanding of God. They then have to wrestle with their images of God and perhaps work mentally and emotionally to transform unfriendly images they may have learned. They are then encouraged to turn their will and life over to the care of the God of their understanding.

Spiritual directees generally arrive with some form of belief in God and want a deeper, clearer, healthier relationship with God. They may be experiencing dryness, where once the pasture was verdant. They may be moving into a new, more complex or troubling season of faith, confronted by a trauma or existential crisis. They, too, engage in theology as part of developing their spirituality.

Often a spiritual directee arrives realizing that she has “beliefs” but longs for something more visceral, less academic, and more fully realized. A directee may be responding to a sense of being “drawn in” to something more deeply spiritual than what he has previously experienced. While a person sponsored in the twelve-step program may grow into such a longing, she does not come to an addiction program with this in mind; she comes longing simply to be free from her addiction. If a sponsored person develops a deeper longing for greater spirituality, a twelve-step sponsor would do well to recommend spiritual direction.

### **Boundaries, Supervision, and Certification**

Boundaries and supervision are important in both relationships. Although I have never heard the word “supervision” used in a twelve-step context, people are (informally) encouraged to have a sponsor who has a


sponsor. In fact, participants often refer to their sponsor’s sponsor as their “grand-sponsor,” a charming way of affirming the connection among those in recovery and their need for guidance among one another.

In the same way, there are no official rules or even much in the way of guidelines for ethical boundaries in twelve-step sponsorship. That said, it is recommend that men sponsor men and women sponsor women, to avoid romantic entanglements. Obviously, the rule here is to avoid sponsorship with whatever gender you are generally attracted to. However, this practice is not universal, and among groups like Overeaters Anonymous, there are often not enough men for all the men needing sponsors. What is made clear (again, by informal, oral tradition) is that “thirteen-stepping” (offering to “sponsor” someone when one’s intentions are actually sexual) is considered predatory, and folks are frequently warned of those known to display this behavior.

By contrast, spiritual direction is more formally organized and has generally accepted, written guidelines for ethical behavior published by a widely recognized, though not legally binding, association, Spiritual Directors International. It is important to note, though, that, unlike professional counselors, pastors, priests, and the like, spiritual directors have no legally enforceable ethical boundaries. There is no legal recourse for a spiritual directee who feels abused or taken advantage of (unless the spiritual director is a professional clergy member) and no license to be rescinded.

There is no certification process for twelve-step sponsorship. There is no official training. There are sponsorship workshops available from time to time, but they are not provided by the World Service Organization of any twelve-step group, which is the only governing agency for twelve-step groups and varies widely from one twelve-step program to another. For the most part, even qualifications for sponsoring vary from meeting to meeting, and there is little in the way of guidelines. There is a pamphlet in most twelve-step programs (AA, Al-Anon, OA) that spells out the nature of sponsorship. But there is nothing to prevent a person from simply declaring himself a sponsor and offering to sponsor others.

While individuals may turn to their clergy person, or another deeply spiritual person, for spiritual direction, there are numerous “training” programs that are



available for spiritual direction. People seeking spiritual direction have a variety of resources from which to find a trained spiritual director, if they so wish. It must also be noted, though, that many of these training programs have no oversight agency and have only their reputation to recommend them. So anyone can “train” spiritual directors.

### **Community**

The nature of twelve-step programs is highly communal, in contrast to spiritual direction, which is nearly always individual. Twelve-step participants are reminded repeatedly in meetings, in conversations, when sharing with others, and in the program literature that the community—the fellowship—is essential to maintaining recovery. While a spiritual director and directee may discuss the importance of community and spiritual fellowship with others, even as an essential part of the spiritual life, there is not nearly so much emphasis as in twelve-step programs. Most sponsors would discontinue sponsoring someone who states that she has ceased going to meetings or intends to do so. A spiritual director would be unlikely to cease work with someone who stops attending church or rejects a formal religious practice.

Because of the community-focused nature of the twelve-step program, much wisdom is provided informally, including how to sponsor. Many meetings require that a person complete the twelve steps before he can sponsor anyone. Other programs, like Overeaters Anonymous, ask that a person complete the first three steps before becoming a “food sponsor” (that is, someone who can receive a participant’s daily food report by telephone, text, or e-mail). Later, he can become a “step sponsor” when he, himself, has completed the steps. But this varies from region to region, even from meeting to meeting.

Addicts seek to maintain their experience of grace through relationships within the context of their Twelve Step communities. There they find a community of love to listen, encourage, and comfort. There they talk about grace and the wonders of helping and new life. . . . The power of a community constituted by love has, by itself and of its nature, the capacity to facilitate ongoing healing. (Morgan and Jordan, 2007)

### **Payment**

One place where sponsorship and spiritual direction are diametrically different is in the area of payment. One never pays a twelve-step sponsor. Never. Twelve-step sponsors consider sponsoring to be an important tool in their own recovery, and few persons sustain long-term recovery without sponsoring others. Freely giving what one has received is a core value of the twelve-step program.

Spiritual directors often, perhaps usually, take money in exchange for their work. Many spiritual directors take only enough money to cover their training, supervision, and continuing education expenses. Most charge significantly less than a therapist. Nearly all will charge something, based on the individual’s ability to pay.


The exception here is a professional clergyperson serving a congregation who will provide spiritual direction to a congregant as part of his pastoral care, with no expectation of additional payment.

### **Nature of the Interactions: Conversations**

#### **Professional versus Nonprofessional**

Because the nature of the conversation between a sponsor and a sponsored person and a spiritual director and directee shapes the whole relationship, in general, director and directee relationships are going to feel “professional” while sponsor and sponsored person relationships will be much less so. Sponsors will sit with the person they sponsor at meetings, go to dinner after a meeting, attend one another’s birthday parties, go to movies together, and be available to talk at nearly any hour, based on the sponsored person’s need. While, in the beginnings, sponsors are encouraged not to put friendship ahead of the work of the program, after the sponsored person has completed the twelve steps and is on the road to recovery, the friendships developed in the twelve-step fellowship, including one’s sponsor, become a very important part of recovery. For most folks, recovery from addiction requires building a whole new life, setting aside past relationships with the people and places of their days in active addiction.

For spiritual directors, this is less the case. For most folks, the only time they associate with their spiritual director is in their meetings with one another. They may



possibly worship in the same religious congregation. This detachment is much encouraged as essential to keeping the focus on the spiritual directee's relationship with God rather than with the director.

A spiritual director will have a professional approach to her sessions, which will include training and supervision. Someone in a twelve-step program cannot, and ought not, expect his sponsor to be a professional. That means sponsors will get caught up in their own baggage, have odd ideas, act like addicts, albeit recovering ones, and, generally, not be fit for the detached neutrality that a spiritual directee can reasonably expect from a director. The expectation for keeping one's own experiences and feelings out of the conversation is essential to effective spiritual direction. Not so for twelve-step sponsors.

### Structure of Conversations

Both twelve-step sponsoring and spiritual direction are ministries of presence. Sponsorship often involves almost daily presence. Spiritual direction most definitely does not.

Daily telephone contact with a sponsor (and other program participants) is essential to staying clean in the early days and months of recovery. For many programs, such as Overeaters Anonymous, the nature of the disease (one eats daily) practically demands daily contact with a sponsor. Many successful twelve-stoppers have a set daily time when they call their sponsor to check in, report how their day went, and describe what they are doing to use the tools of the program that day.

Such a practice would be considered inappropriate for spiritual direction. In fact, that level of contact between spiritual director and directee would indicate unhealthy enmeshment and codependence.

While a person in a twelve-step program initiates the relationship by asking someone to sponsor him, from that point, the sponsor plays a highly directive role in the meetings. The sponsor will tell the person he sponsors how often they will meet, will set the time and day according to what is convenient for the sponsor, rather than the person being sponsored, and will, especially in the beginning, outline the progress of the meetings as they work together through the steps. Much of this is considered to be a demonstration of a sponsored person's willingness to "go to any lengths" to achieve sobriety and healing.

The sponsor may have a process given to her by her own sponsor; there are workbooks published by the World Service Organization of most of the larger twelve-step groups; and *Alcoholics Anonymous: The Big Book* is considered the basic text for nearly all twelve-step programs.

The sponsor will decide when it is time to move on to the next step and will decide how honestly and thoroughly the person going through the steps has worked the current step. Many sponsors have a particular method they like for guiding people through the fourth step, taking inventory. And many sponsors will have a set of expectations for the use of the tools of the twelve-step program. They may expect regular attendance at meetings (for example, three times a week) and a certain amount of time each day devoted to prayer or meditation and writing and reading of program materials. They may "require" a certain number of telephone calls to other program participants each day, a service task such as putting up chairs at meetings, and, often, a daily plan of action. This willingness to "work the program" assures a sponsor that he is not wasting his time on someone who is not ready.

This kind of direction is antithetical to spiritual direction. A spiritual director allows the directee to bring the agenda to each meeting, may offer suggestions, but only if sought, and does not judge the "progress" of the directee (thank goodness, or my spiritual director would surely have given up on me in my third or fourth year). For this reason, while a spiritual director may offer suggestions, she provides no recommendations, assigns no "homework," and does not "pick up where we left off."

Perhaps because a spiritual director does not see his work with the directee as having immediate life-and-death consequences, the spiritual director has no need to press for "progress" through some identifiable series of stages to spiritual achievement. While spiritual directors surely know that the spiritual life and death of their directee is as urgent as the physical life and death faced by an addict, they also know that it is seldom the case that highly directive guidance will achieve their mutual goal. A spiritual director who has concerns about a directee's readiness is in muddier waters and is liable to be vastly more cautious in discontinuing the direction relationship.

In twelve-step programming, sponsors are often quite firm and instructive. Spiritual directors tend to limit



themselves to a listening practice, a noticing practice, a prayer practice, and a practice of presence.

### **Mindfulness/Presence: How Do We Listen?**

*I spent many hours helping her to focus on herself instead of continually on others, and admonishing her about her destructive attempts at manipulating and controlling her alcoholic husband. I didn't know how to sit in silence with this woman. It was hard for me to hear and feel her pain without wanting to fix it, somehow. (Stockton)*

Spiritual direction and sponsorship have very different ways of listening and very different things to be listening for. Both require the cultivation of attention and presence. But the similarities end there.

While many a twelve-step sponsor can be effective by listening a little and instructing a lot, the essence of spiritual direction is listening without instruction. In the initial months of sobriety, especially, addicts are admonished that “your best thinking got you here.” Learning to trust one’s intuition is encouraged further along in the process. Addicts are encouraged to do more listening than talking and to listen especially for how they are like others, rather than “terminally unique.” Insisting on one’s distinctiveness from other addicts is a recipe for relapse and precludes the growth required to stay clean and sober.

Cultivation of attention on the part of the spiritual director is essential to keep the focus on the activity of God rather than the insight of the director. Spiritual direction does not have the “coaching” quality sponsorship often has. And it very much focuses on the spiritual director’s unique relationship with God, their specific consolations and desolations, and their individual, “one-size-does-not-fit-all” spiritual practice.

Both sponsor and spiritual director need to be able to say what needs saying without fear of how that will impact the relationship. This is more challenging for a spiritual director than for a twelve-step sponsor. Sponsors are often blunt and directive. Being “teachable” is considered key for a person going through the twelve steps. While no one encourages cruelty or heartlessness, kindness and gentleness are not much valued either, except in Al Anon, where many folks find refuge from abuse and attack.

A spiritual director, however, whether he agrees to it or not, is seen as something of a representative of God. So kindness and compassion are expectations. A spiritual director may feel a need for directness, but will be very conscious of the readiness of the directee and will have built a relationship that can withstand plain speaking. The director will also try to be as gracious and prayerful as possible in such a situation. A twelve-step sponsor may or may not, depending on his temperament.

“[W]hile desperate situations may seem to be crying out for immediate, tangible solutions, sometimes the best thing is to listen for the sorrow, the longing, and the need for comfort” (Stockton). This is a succinct portrayal of what is different between sponsorship and spiritual direction. While the recovering addict must acquire the spiritual depth to hear God’s voice of wisdom for herself, sponsors are very often called upon to help the person they are sponsoring figure out a solution to a problem using the tools of the twelve-step program instead of the tools she was using in addiction. This is part of learning how to think and act differently, and in healthier, non-addictive ways. Spiritual direction is not really a problem-solving process—at least, not in this sense.

### **Accountability in the Relationship**

It is not enough to be kind, compassionate, and helpful. We are here to help one another grow into the “new life” (the always-being-made-new life) of divine connection. Spiritual direction and twelve-step sponsorship have differing approaches to accountability.

Both processes involve a lot of humbling and getting our egos out of the way—spiritual growth comes from this and it is central to both journeys. In twelve-step sponsorship, there is direct accountability to one’s sponsor, and one’s sponsor may well ask intrusive questions, such as “What did you eat today?” or “Did you watch pornography online today?” Much is made of the power of honesty in these matters. Because addicts are liars, learning to be truthful is arduous, and a sponsor may press in this area.

In the absence of evidence to the contrary, a spiritual director is unlikely to question a directee’s honesty, at least in the plain sense of it. Spiritual directors, however, may well find themselves faced with a directee who is struggling to be honest with himself, since, as men-

tioned above, our human capacity for self-deception knows no bounds.

One important note: a spiritual director, while she may hear “confessional” stories from her directees, is not a “confessor” in any official sense, nor does she have the legal protections of such. Spiritual directees need to know that their spiritual director, while abiding by confidentiality guidelines, is not a legal “confessor.”

While a twelve-step sponsor cannot claim any legal right to the “seal of the confessional,” he most definitely acts as a confessor for a sponsored person during his fifth step, when the sponsored person admits “the exact nature of [his] wrongs” to God and another human being. It is commonly expected that this human being will be the sponsor. However, the Big Book clearly states that one may seek out a religious or therapeutic professional for this.

### **Value of Repetition and Revisiting and Circling Back**

Repetition and circling back are tools used in both recovery work and in spiritual direction.

In twelve-step programs, one is reminded that it is the nature of addiction to lurk nearby, to remember that one makes mistakes (slips) and even abandons the path altogether (relapse). It is not uncommon for a person in recovery to lament his repeated bad decisions (for example, getting into unhealthy romantic relationships). In addition, twelve-step programs encourage not just the recognition that we will grow two-steps-forward-and-one-step-back, but that constant repetition is essential to continued spiritual fitness, upon which the daily reprieve from the cravings and the obsession are entirely dependent. Multiple meetings per week, repeated readings of twelve-step literature, frequent service, daily contact with others in recovery—these are all considered essential. Occasionally, one will encounter someone who spends some time in a twelve-step program, gets “recovered,” and moves on, leaving much of the twelve-step program practices behind. This is unusual.

Repetition in twelve-step programs is about learning to make long-term good choices instead of immediate feel-better choices. Constant repetition of the steps, the slogans, the literature, and the meetings creates new neural pathways that allow a recovering person to leave behind addictive thinking and to “groove in” new ways of think-

ing and behaving. Repetition is based on the principle that we do not so much think our way into new acting as act our way into new thinking.

In twelve-step work, a tenth step allows for a revisiting of the moral inventory process on a daily basis in order to stay current and honest with oneself. Many religious traditions have something similar (for example, the examen), which may be developed in spiritual direction but are not an expected part of the work, as is the case in twelve-step work.

In spiritual direction, circling back runs more along the lines of recognizing the cycle of seasons of darkness and desolation and embracing them. The key question is not “How do I feel?” Rather, it is “Am I moving toward God or away?” It is a process of ongoing discernment—discernment between God’s voice and our ego-voice. There is holiness in repetition. It gives us access to multivalency.

### **Conclusion**

*The willingness to hear and follow one’s inner voice of wisdom was eventually to become paramount in my method of overcoming addiction. If we deny leadings that come from spirit we feel incomplete—strangers to our own lives, stranger to spirit. (Morgan and Jordan, 122)*

Ultimately, in both spiritual direction and twelve-step recovery, the spiritual director and the sponsor must help the directee or person being sponsored to mature spiritually, to let go of magical thinking, and to surrender the idea that they can control life, much less control God. It is common among persons seeking to follow a spiritual path to get caught up in superstition; it is a very subtle temptation to both the religious and nonreligious person.

Everyone wants to know that they are going to be okay, that God will never abandon them. They want to be able to know that there is nothing to be afraid of. Both sponsors and spiritual directors will have to engage in the hard work of growth that enables us to live confident of God’s presence, seeing the thread of grace that runs through our lives, without resorting to platitudes or untrue promises. That is where the deeper theology of spiritual direction can help a person in recovery to let go of trying to control God and learn to live in the grace that is their life.



Persons with addictions may come to spiritual direction from recovery programs because, as they grow in their recovery program, they come to need or want a deeper relationship with God and have somehow learned that spiritual direction is available to them. It is also possible that a therapist has discovered their addiction, or is treating them for addiction, and recommends spiritual direction.

It may be that, in the course of spiritual direction, a spiritual director comes to realize that her directee is blocked in her spiritual growth because of an unrecognized or unaddressed addiction. This is especially difficult, because spiritual directors are not addiction specialists and may not know how to recognize addiction. Some addictions are subtle. For example, sexual addiction may be well-buried, especially in a religious person. Food addiction is very hard, because most people do not see it as an addiction. Even though many folks are aware of the disease nature of alcohol or drug addiction, or even gambling, food is much more subtle. A spiritual director is unlikely to notice, perhaps unwilling to attribute, or simply at a loss as to how to address the ways in which an obese person's food is blocking her from a relationship with God.

Of course, in the case of all addictions, recommending twelve-step programs as a spiritual source of healing is available to a spiritual director, but only if the director has an understanding of what twelve-step recovery offers and how it differs from spiritual direction.

In the end, the distinction between twelve-step sponsorship and spiritual direction may be seen as a shared journey of relationship and conversation, with one person as guide but with fundamentally different questions for the work.

A twelve-step sponsor will ask, "What is the next step in the program for this person? Is she honestly working the program?" A spiritual director will ask, "What is God doing here? How can I shine a light on it so the spiritual directee can see for herself?"

Both are sacred relationships in search of the sacred. ■

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## Links

SDI Ethical Guidelines: <http://www.sdiworld.org/sites/default/files/publications/Guidelines%20Revised%202014-proof1-2.pdf>

Sponsorship in AA: [www.aa.org/assets/en\\_US/p-15\\_Q&AonSpon.pdf](http://www.aa.org/assets/en_US/p-15_Q&AonSpon.pdf)

Sponsorship in AI Anon: <http://ecom.alanon.org/ItemDetail?iProductCode=P31&CATEGORY=PAMPHLETS>

Sponsorship in OA: [http://bookstore.aa.org/pc\\_product\\_detail.asp?key=BFC0A802D0BE419986BBC4CIDEF8BE64](http://bookstore.aa.org/pc_product_detail.asp?key=BFC0A802D0BE419986BBC4CIDEF8BE64)