

SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT¹

Once this preamble is done, it might be convenient to make clear what it is NOT spiritual accompaniment:

- Accompanying is not directing, it is not about the classic Spiritual Direction. The fact of doing focused exploration does not mean that the focus is directive, but that we specifically approach the spiritual dimension.
- It is not indoctrination, or any kind of inoculation of beliefs.
- It is not psychotherapy, as it does not specifically address the different and possible cognitive, emotional or behavioral disorders; yes, the accompaniment uses validated therapeutic communication strategies.
- It is not helping to flee from the experience of suffering that cannot be objectified as a problem in itself consubstantial to the human condition, from its profound fragility, but in any case to facilitate what can be integrated and transcended. When you try to flee from this type of suffering, it usually ends up returning.

And what, then, would spiritual accompaniment be? There can be multiple definitions and perspectives. We have chosen the following: spiritual accompaniment is the practice of recognizing, welcoming and giving space to the inner dialogue of those who suffer, so that they can give voice to their questions and give life to their answers. That is, to help the person to awaken or to bring to light the longing, the inner search that every person can have.

To accompany not all models of therapeutic relationship are useful. We propose as the most suitable the model developed by Henry Nowen (1) known as Wounded Healer, in which both the companion and the accompanied are in symmetry conditions, from the spiritual perspective, as a framework for the therapeutic encounter. The companion knows his/her abilities and resources, but also his/her wounds and therefore does not project them on the other; rather, it helps them to recognize their own fragility, which will make them much more tolerant of the other's. Furthermore, he/she deeply believes in the other's resources without denying his/her difficulties. It is about basing the relationship from the common of the human condition, not from the domain. In this sense, the entire accompaniment process tries to connect both with the needs and with the satisfiers (potential or real) and the possibilities.

Starting from this model of relationship, we can now describe the essential ingredients of spiritual accompaniment. Namely:

- A bond based on trust, as the first and necessary tool.
- Active presence and attention. It is about not running away from the questions and the anxieties and fears behind it. It is about conjugating the verb to be, to know how to be present as a silent testimony of their pain and their process.

¹ J. Barbero, R. Giró, C. Gomis, The spiritual accompaniment, <http://fundacionmetta.org>

- Active listening. It involves the development of different active listening strategies provided by methodologies such as counseling.
- Compassion. According to Ekman there is compassionate empathy and it would be the highest degree of empathy, called by Goleman empathic concern. With this type of empathy, we not only welcome and understand the other person's problem, but we also feel spontaneously moved to help him/her. It is the same as compassion.

The word compassion is not fashionable. In the recent past and even today it has charitable- welfare connotations. In our context it is something very different. It refers to the attitude that moves us from internal shock to the need or suffering of others towards efficient action to accompany the patient and help him/her get out of his/her situation.

Compassion requires empathy, which allows us to perceive and understand the need in the other; it also requires the desire to help and alleviate the suffering of the other; sometimes the courage to approach the stormy inner world of the sufferer; and always the action oriented to improve the situation of the one seen as someone close (Rinpoche). Compassion involves commitment, intentionality, in this case facing contradictions and fear of the other who suffers.