Spirituality
Soul Seeing



(Unsplash/Greg Rosenke)



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I once observed an unspoken reaction by one student toward another in a class on spirituality and psychology I was teaching.

The first student was a Christian evangelical who liked to sit near the back of the classroom. She was outspoken, passionate and prone to anger. The other student was a quiet, reserved Buddhist with a great deal of counseling experience who seemed ready for a next step both spiritually and psychologically.

When the first student would make a strident point, the quiet student grimaced. Since he sat in the front row, she couldn't see his reactions to her emotional outbursts. I did, but didn't say anything to him since I felt the timing wasn't right. Finally, the outspoken student got so worked up about an issue we were discussing, she threw her pen at the blackboard and it just missed my head. I knew the time had come — ironically, for both of them. This wasn't the place to play "Blackboard Jungle," and there was another teaching moment as well.

Later that day, the first student came up to me and apologized. "I was over the top," she said. "Is there something I can do about my emotions?"

"Emotions are a gift," I answered. "But why not consider some short-term counseling on how to prune them? Jesus spoke about pruning, didn't he? When you prune something, it doesn't blossom less. It blossoms more deeply. And so it will be an even better gift not only for you to have but also for those around you to experience." She did and it helped her focus her deep feelings in a more productive way.



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In the case of the Buddhist student, right after the class when the expression on his face showed the greatest displeasure, I asked him if he would stay a moment after everyone had left.

Once we were alone, I said to him, "She is your spiritual mentor."

He looked back at me in surprise and said, "I'll have to think about that!"

"No," I replied. "She *is* your spiritual mentor. This isn't something to think about. It's something to practice. She can be a powerful spiritual guide for you if you let her. She has much to teach you about yourself, and about how and why you react the way you do." I smiled and left the room. He needed time and space with himself, not with me.

The Dalai Lama once said that he learned a great deal from those who differed with him in views or style, or even didn't like him very much. They would tell him things

others would not, and he benefited from their insights. So can we when we encounter people that we find difficult. This is especially crucial during this time of turbulent religious, political and societal discussions.

Once we have committed to seeing disagreeable people differently, a new question arises: What kinds of friends would help us *flourish*? I think there are four types of friends that enable us to remain resilient, challenged, supported and encouraged to live a spiritually rich life.

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The first type of friend is the *prophet.* No one likes the prophet. Henry David Thoreau once wrote, "If I knew for a certainty that a man was coming to my house with the conscious design of doing me good, I should run for my life." However, the prophet asks, "What voices are guiding you in life?" The prophet challenges us to hear, and to discern.

The second type of friend is the *cheerleader.* This is the understanding soul who encourages you and lets you see the loving face of God. If you have only prophets, you will burn out. If you only have cheerleaders, you won't grow. But together they balance clarity and kindness for us.

The third type of friend is the *harasser* because in seeking to take God seriously, we often take a detour and begin to take ourselves too seriously which is dangerous for us as well as those around us. The harasser helps us to cultivate a sense of humor about ourselves.

Finally, we need the *inspirational* friend that calls us to be all that we can be without embarrassing us that we are where we are. The inspirational friend helps bring out the best in us.

With these four voices in our life, we can truly appreciate the African proverb: If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.

Even if your companion on the journey first makes you grimace.