



In a scene from Steven Spielberg's "Saving Private Ryan" American soldiers take their posts. (OSV News/Courtesy of Dreamworks)



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Steven Spielberg is good for the soul. He's not only a master filmmaker; he's a spiritual master. His movies lift us up, make us grateful and awaken the human desire to be good. His stories — built on the spiritual values of love, compassion, gratitude, wonder, beauty and joy — stay with us for life.

What is the source of his creative spirituality?

He disclosed at least part of the answer in 1999 during an interview on the TV series "Inside the Actor's Studio," when a student asked first why listening matters so much to him, and second, whether he believes in aliens. Spielberg laughed, then answered with disarming seriousness.

In Judaism, he explained, the most important prayer is the Shema: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is One!" From childhood, Spielberg was taught that the most important spiritual act he could do is listen. Not listening to outside authority, but to the voice within. (And yes, he does believe in aliens.)

Listening, then, is both essential to Spielberg's creative process and is the secret of his spirituality. His storytelling, like the Shema, is a form of prayer. Our great mystics have told us that prayer is not asking, but listening. Theologian [Dan Horan has observed](#) that "God whispers in a world that shouts to us incessantly." Spielberg has always paid attention to "the still small voice" (1 Kings 19:12) — and his characters do, too. His movies show us how the sacred arrives quietly. The shout is human; the whisper is divine.

In "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" (1977), no one yells at Roy Neary (Richard Dreyfuss) to go to the mountain and enter the ship. He sees a shape, feels a pull, hears a tone. It is the whisper of purpose; daring to answer the call, even when others don't hear it. And Roy, like E.T. and other Spielberg heroes, gets to go home.

Speaking of going home, when Elliott rode his bike with E.T. in the basket, wrapped in a cloak like Christ's, across the moon, we soared. When E.T. got sick in the forest, then rose again on the scientist's table, we cheered. When we heard those final words that E.T. speaks to the children — to Gertie: "Be good;" to Michael: "Thank you;" to Elliott: "I'll be right here." — we cried. When E.T. waddles into the mother ship and Elliott laughs as it zigzags into the sky like a Christmas tree ornament, we screamed with joy. Surely, the movie shows us, "Unless you become as a child, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3).

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"The Color Purple" (1985) is about family and forgiveness. Through community, Celie (Whoopi Goldberg) comes to know herself as God knows her, and to love herself as God loves her, unconditionally. When Celie and her long-lost sister Nettie run toward each other and embrace in a field of purple flowers, your heart swells with the same love they have for each other, the love that God has for us all. Spielberg took a hit from some critics for showing so many beautiful images in a world bruised from violence, but I think the movie resonates with what the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins revealed: a world that is wounded but "charged with the grandeur of God." Or, as Celie's friend Shrug Avery puts it, "I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it."

The voice in "Saving Private Ryan" (1998) is conscience. Captain Miller (Tom Hanks) doesn't shout his values; he lives them. His final whisper to the man he saves — "Earn this" — is a call to do likewise unto others. And at the end, the saving grace is the throughline we see in so many Spielberg films, gratitude. Ryan visits Miller's grave to thank him. He implores his wife, "Tell me I'm a good man." She assures him: "You are." He has earned this.

Schindler's List (1993) is a powerful statement about moral responsibility and a poignant expression of gratitude. Schindler's transformation from corrupt capitalist to a man of conscience isn't melodramatic; it's quiet, gradual, internal. He begins to listen to the suffering around him. The whisper becomes the soul's command: Do something. At the end of the movie, actual survivors saved by Schindler, together with the actors who played them, march by his grave and place stones on his tomb. Oskar Schindler saved his life by losing it for others.

"Munich" (2005) is a gripping thriller about the Mossad agents who tracked down and assassinated those responsible for the massacre of Jewish athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics. A picture with complex ethical issues, it shows how the pursuit of vengeance, no matter the cause, ultimately destroys the avengers as well as their prey. Whatever we do to another — for good or for ill — we do to ourselves. At the end of the movie, no one can remember when the carousel of revenge even began, or imagine how it will ever end. Roger Ebert [called](#) this movie "an act of courage and conscience." Spielberg [called](#) it a prayer for peace.

In the acclaimed director's latest [film](#), "Disclosure Day" (2026), TV weather forecaster Margaret Fairchild (Emily Blunt), led by the inner voice, goes on a breathtaking adventure in search of extraterrestrial life. At the end of her chase, the whole world is watching as she looks straight into a TV camera as it zooms in, closer and closer to her face, which fills the screen. She tells the world something vitally important, what the Intelligence beyond our world wants us to know. She whispers, "Listen..."

Her whisper is the Shema in cinematic form, the same quiet summons Spielberg has been giving us for 50 years: Hear. Listen. Be present.

Thank you, Steven Spielberg, for listening. Hurry up and make another movie. We'll be right here waiting.