Compassion-Based Spiritual Direction:

Internal Family Systems as a Resource for Spiritual Companions

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Rosa whisks into her spiritual direction session in a whirlwind of interior distress. For years she has nursed a deep-seated desire to become an ordained minister but a voice in her head has kept insisting that she did not have what it takes. Now her children are in school—one in elementary, two in junior high—and she finds herself surfing the Internet scouring seminary Masters of Divinity programs. It doesn’t go any further. After some time absorbed in her search, she catches herself. She is certain her family would fall apart if she wasn’t around to care for them, so she flicks off the computer and fumes her way through meal preparations and after-school pickups. It’s been getting worse. She’s becoming more irritable with her partner, more resentful of her children’s shuttling needs, and all the more certain she would fail as a student and make a poor excuse of a parish minister. Still, she just can’t shake it.

“*I was up until 2:00 in the morning last night*!” she unloads on you. “*2:00!* I couldn’t sleep after I snapped at my partner for not helping out around the house more, then I got up and printed out an application for seminary—I actually printed it out! But I couldn’t even start to fill it out. I mean, who am I kidding? At my age? I’m not smart enough to go back to school. And what kind of a minister neglects her own family? They’d be lost without me. They wouldn’t eat for a week. But just once I’d like to do something for myself—just once! I *never* do anything just for me. I’m telling you, I’m filling out that application. Oh, who am I kidding? I’d flunk out the first day. But I’ve wanted this forever—since I was a child. Surely that means something! Ahhh what am I going to do? Please tell me, what am I going to do with all of this?”

Indeed, as a spiritual director, what might you do?

Internal Family Systems (IFS) is a contemplative, empowering, and compassion-based process of personal restoration and spiritual reconnection. Developed over the past 40 years by Dr. Richard Schwartz and the Center for Self-Leadership (now the IFS Institute), it has become a recognized, evidence-based approach to psychotherapy taught and practiced across the world (Schwartz, Schwartz & Sweezy, Holmes). It also offers valuable insights for those in the work of spiritual companioning. IFS provides a model of the psyche that illuminates movements within the soul, and it outlines a process of spiritual restoration that grounds persons in their own Self-essence; reconnects them with the sacred energy that animates the true Self within; and invites them into lives of alignment with both their own sense of the Sacred and their own best Self within the concrete realities of their daily circumstances. Essentially, IFS is a contemporary spiritual path. And with its clarity into the dynamics of the soul, its radical hospitality toward all that the soul carries, and its unqualified trust in the essence of Self, fused with the Sacred, within each person, it offers generative resources for a compassion-based approach to spiritual direction.

*The Spiritual Purposes that Guide IFS*

IFS is a form of soul work. It facilitates a spiritual realignment that is personally and relationally restorative. The spiritual purposes that guide IFS soul work are resonant with the purposes that guide spiritual direction. An IFS practitioner meeting with someone like Rosa, for example, would have three purposes that guide would the session with her.

*1. Interior Freedom*: Like many contemplative traditions, IFS recognizes the differences between states of interior activation when we are *possessed* by emotions or impulses hijacking our consciousness, and states of contemplative groundedness when we are *aware* of our interior movements without being captured by them. When Rosa walks into her spiritual direction session, she is consumed by her conflicting emotions and impulses. Unable to free herself from their possessive clutch, she is swept away by their power, whether that be in losing herself in Internet searches or spewing her frustrations out at her partner. Like spiritual direction, IFS helps her detach from her emotions and impulses, and invites her into a grounded and contemplative curiosity toward them—a “long, loving look at the real” that is aware and self-reflective, not energetically unconscious and driven (Burghardt). Like snow settling in a stilled snow globe, this interior freedom gives rise to the clarity necessary for spiritual discernment.

*2. Self-Leadership*: IFS recognizes that a true Self resides within every human being, an inner ‘I’ in the storm, with the capacities for grounded personal power, clarity in discernment, and genuine compassionate connection with others. Like spiritual direction, the aim of IFS is to invite a directee back home to themselves. It does not offer them sage advice, nor buoy them up with encouragement, nor direct them to resources where the ‘answer’ may be found. Rather, IFS assists the directee in accessing their own Self-essence, listening to their own interior wisdom, and trusting the spiritual resources that already dwell within them. Even in the midst of her agitation, Rosa has a Self essence within her that is capable of hearing the various yearnings within the movements of her soul and discerning a path that feels right for her. IFS invites Rosa to live from the inside out, guided by the wisdom of her own best Self that is not dependent upon the support or resources of the spiritual director she confides in.

*3. Spiritual Alignment:* IFS recognizes that the essence of Self that dwells within each person is spiritual in nature. It animates with an energy that is intrinsically restorative both personally and relationally. When living out of our Self-essence, our capacities for calm within chaos, confidence within challenge, and compassion even toward the difficult are expanded. In addition, our Self-essence is infused with the Sacred energy that flows through the universe sustaining and restoring all things. Rosa’s true Self abides in the God that she knows, a God companioning her in the midst of her distress. Like spiritual direction, the aim of IFS is to assist her in becoming reconnected both with the true Self that dwells within her and with the God that is with her in her distress inviting her into fullness of life. IFS is a process of discernment; it helps another align with the Sacred reality they know, and draw from their own spiritual resources, within the concrete circumstances of their lives.

*The Core Principles of IFS*

So what are the core features of this map of the soul and contemporary spiritual path? As Schwartz describes it, IFS emerged when he, as a therapist, began listening to the experiences of his clients. A die-hard family systems theorist who insisted that all mental health challenges were the product of dysfunctional external social systems (and for whom exploration of the interior life was anathema), Schwartz became frustrated when his patients remained symptomatic even after their family systems were constructively reconstituted. With nothing else to try, he asked his clients to describe their own experience to him. They became his teachers. What they taught him is encapsulated in the following core principles.

*1. Our personalities are multiple, not singular.* Every one of us is composed of multiple internal parts. As Roberto Assagioli observed in his work on Psychosynthesis, we all have subpersonalities—energy gestalts within our psyche that are unique identities each with their own set of emotions, values, impulses, even vocabularies. IFS calls them ‘Parts,’ simply because that is how Schwartz’s patients referred to them. Many of us do as well. “A part of me really wants to go a social gathering this weekend,” we might say, “but another part of me craves the solitude of a retreat.” Or, “A part of me knows I should get back to a work project, but a part of me wants to put it off and head out to a movie.” Or, “A part of me insists that I should stick to my New Year’s resolution… but a part of me really wants to eat that ice cream.” IFS recognizes that multiplicity is normal; it is how all of us are wired.

As we take a closer look at Rosa, we see that she too is composed of multiple parts. Part of her feels called to the ministry—she calls it the Priest within her; while part of her tells her that she doesn’t have what it takes—the Critic inside of her; part of her feels compelled to nurture her loved ones—the Caregiver within her; while another part of her resents having to take care of everybody and yearns to do things for herself—the Fiery Free Spirit. These parts make themselves known in different ways—the Priest lures her into surfing the Internet for seminaries and printing applications; the Critic comes as a self-deprecating voice determined to defeat her; the Caregiver comes as a drive to meet her loved ones’ needs—preparing meals, doing laundry, and shuttling her kids—or as guilt when she resents having to do it at all; while the Fiery Free Spirit comes out as anger when it’s all too much, or as the glee she feels when she’s finally out on her own. Each part has its own distinct desires, values, joys, and fears. Each one would direct her into different courses of action. And they all dwell side by side within the same personality.

*2. Parts relate to each other systemically.* The sometimes confounding name ‘Internal Family Systems’ is derived from Schwartz’s observation that the parts that inhabit our inner world relate to one another as members of a family system relate to each other in a household. Parts have a discernible logic to them. Some are allied, working together; some are polarized, pulling in opposite directions to stabilize a system under threat of disequilibrium; some parts are protective, shielding other more vulnerable parts in hiding; some parts are proactive, preempting potential threats to the system; other parts are reactive, storming in when the threat has already infiltrated.

The intricacies of these systemic relationships are beyond our present scope. Suffice it to say that IFS offers a map that makes coherent what so often feels chaotic. As a beginning glimpse, we can see some of the systemic relationships of Rosa’s parts. When the Priest gets activated, nursing its desire for ministry, the system experiences disequilibrium—who knows what dangers may ensue if the Priest steps out in pursuit of its desire. The Critic, sensing the danger, kicks in to discourage the Priest from dangerously rocking the boat. The Caregiver allies with the Critic in an attempt to preempt any possible damage to family relationships. This activates the Fiery Free Spirit who, in alliance with the Priest, is sick and tired of the Caregiver minimizing Rosa’s personal needs and desires. Mapping out the various activated parts and their relation to one another—even literally on a piece of paper—in and of itself can bring some relief. Our inner world makes sense. The cacophonous becomes coherent.

*3. Parts mean well.* At the heart of the IFS model is the radically liberating, albeit counter-intuitive, recognition that every part within us is rooted in positive intent. Parts want what is best for us. They fight to help us survive, to protect us from harm, to prompt us to thrive in our personal giftedness, to keep us connected to our tribe or our loved ones. Every emotion, every impulse, every drive, every voice chattering in our heads—i.e. every part that gets activated within us—at its core is good. It is fighting for our lives. To be sure, some parts employ rather destructive strategies in this—angry parts may lash out in violence; anesthetizing parts may binge on alcohol; self-critical parts may lacerate us with devastating venom. IFS in no way minimizes the pain such extreme parts can cause—nor does it legitimate the violence these parts may inflict. However, it does recognize that all of our parts, even the extreme ones, are trying to secure something essential to our survival and flourishing. Activated parts are rooted in fears before immanent threats, longings for life-essential needs to be met, and unhealed wounds still tender within us. When parts take over, they are cries for healing and bids for life. They ache to be heard; they crave compassion; and they long to be met at the core of their deep needs. Paradoxically, when parts are met with such compassionate understanding, they relax—they release their grip on the driving wheel of our consciousness; and a path opens up that honors their concerns.

Rosa’s parts mean well too. Perhaps it plays out as follows. The Priest knows Rosa’s untapped gifts and yearns that she flourish in meaningful vocation. The Caregiver values relationships, and works hard to stay connected to Rosa’s loved ones. The Fiery Free Spirit values autonomy and thrives when soaring in her own individuality. Even the Critic means well for Rosa—perhaps protecting Rosa from putting herself out there and being ridiculed, aching for her flourishing but terrified of the devastation such ridicule would bring. The deep desires of Rosa’s parts may be hidden, buried underneath the harshness with which they erupt within her. Yet even in their harshness, they mean Rosa well. They are fighting for her life in the only way they know how.

*4. Each person has a core spiritual essence that IFS calls ‘Self.’* In addition to the various parts that inhabit our psyches, a true Self resides as well, down at the center of our soul’s being. Numerous spiritual traditions have observed something similar, referring to it variously, for example, as the Buddha Nature, the Imago Dei, Atman, Christ consciousness, or the Inner Light (Schwartz & Falconer). Richard Rohr describes it as the immortal diamond buried in the mucky depths within us (Rohr). IFS simply calls it ‘Self.’ Again, Schwartz took his lead from his clients. When he asked them what part of them was there when the other parts relaxed, they said, “This isn’t a part. It’s me. It’s my real self.”

For IFS, this essence of Self dwells undamaged within every living soul—even the most traumatized. Like a pilot light of the human spirit, it is ever shining, even if deeply hidden behind hardened and destructive exteriors. This Self-essence is a spiritual energy. It reverberates in the energized stillness of profound peace; the emboldened radiance of personal empowerment; the resuscitative vitality of soaring in one’s gifts; the sparkle of lucidity within clear discernment; the warm wash of love overflowing toward a loved one. As a mnemonic device, IFS describes the qualities of this Self energy with eight C’s: Calm, Curiosity, Confidence, Clarity, Courage, Creativity, Connectedness, and Compassion. These are the eight faces of the diamond called Self. Rarely, if ever, are we radiant in all eight faces of the diamond at once. More typically, we access one face at a time, perhaps with glimmers of others infused. This, however, is plenty. One face of this diamond is more than sufficient to refract the light of spiritual energy. It is a light that flows from beyond.

Though she may be having trouble accessing it during this moment of interior distress, Rosa, too, has a core Self-essence within her. Underneath the impulsive behaviors, the compulsive caregiving, the self-belittling, and the reactive irritability, she has capacities for grounded calm, self-confidence, creative problem-solving, and clarity of direction. Undoubtedly, she has experienced this Self energy before—when she beholds her loved ones sleeping and her deep affection for them washes over her; when she watches her priest officiate a service and a sense rises within her that she, too, can bear the sacred for others; when she takes some time for herself to walk in the woods alone and a whisper of sacred presence reassures her of what she knows—that through it all, all will be well. These are moments when Rosa is able to access the Self energy within her. This energy is her most valuable spiritual resource. It is the energy that will guide and sustain her. It is the energy in which she can sense the Sacred leading her from within; and it is the energy with which she can access the qualities she needs to follow the Sacred’s lead.

*5. Self-leadership (i.e. Self listening to and tending to parts) is the path to personal restoration and spiritual vitality.* IFS recognizes that, essentially, there are two ways of being in the world. Either we are grounded in Self energy, or some part of us is driving the bus of our consciousness. Sometimes these parts endure for long stretches, like a chronic anxiety, for example, or a part that powers one through hours of work. Other times, parts may come with the fury of a flash flood—say a rage that erupts when someone slights us or a sudden urge to binge on junk food. Either way, when a part is driving the bus, we are dislodged from our Self essence. The part is single-mindedly attending to its own agenda. The needs and desires of other parts are minimized. And we are cut off from the spiritual resources that reside in our Self-essence.

For IFS, the path to human flourishing is Self-leadership. We function best when we are grounded in our true Self. Indeed, we are most psychologically healthy and spiritually vital when we live out of our Self essence. Self-leadership does not entail the absence of our parts. Our parts do not simply abandon us. Nor should they. We need parts to survive and flourish in the world. Self-leadership is when we are grounded in our best Self harmonizing the needs and concerns of our various parts. Like a conductor of an orchestra, the Self is aware of the parts that are present and invites each to play its role without dominating nor acquiescing to any of the other parts.

How is such Self-leadership accessed and cultivated? Much like a spiritual director committed to ‘finding God in all things,’ IFS starts right where one is (Barry). When a part has hijacked our consciousness, we are ‘blended’ with that part—that part has completely taken us over. In the moment, it feels like we are nothing but that part. This is an illusion. We are more than our anger, say, or our need to caregive—we have a Self-essence within us that is sacred and spiritually resourceful. The first invitation, when we are possessed by a part, is to ‘unblend,’ to cultivate a grounded open awareness that a particular part is activated within us right now. This is moving from “I am so mad I can scream” to “Whoa, there’s a part inside of me that really is angry right now.” Such grounded awareness has been described by spiritual traditions as contemplative presence, mindfulness, detachment, or emotional intelligence (being able to *name* our emotions without *being* our emotions). When we cultivate a grounded non-judgmental awareness of an interior state, we settle into an inner calm. Such calm is the initial shore of Self energy arising within us.

From this grounded Self energy, we can extend an open curiosity toward the part that has been activated. We trust that this part is present for a reason. It may be out of control, or screaming loudly, or acting out destructively, but it is rooted in something aching to be heard. When we engage our parts with the same care-filled listening we would offer a friend of ours activated in the same way, we can hear the deep need that is feeling threatened, or the deep longing aching to be fulfilled, or the deep wound that is still tender and in need of our care. Counter-intuitively, when our parts feel heard they relax. Simultaneously, our Self energy expands. Compassion for the pain our parts carry increases; clarity about what is really going on intensifies; confidence that we can see this through solidifies; and creativity energizes sparking an out-of-the-box problem-solving that can tend to all of our parts’ needs. The Self is conducting the orchestra once more; and each part is playing their piece of the music in harmony with all of the others.

The IFS practitioner would invite Rosa into this path of restorative Self-leadership. It would recognize that Rosa walks into her session blended with her parts. It would help Rosa cultivate a grounded awareness of those parts that is free from their possessive grasp and is genuinely curious about each of their needs. And it would invite Rosa, from her best Self, to listen deeply to their needs and concerns, align herself with the source of her spiritual resources, then discern a path forward that honors the concerns of all of her parts. What this might look like in an IFS-inspired spiritual direction session will be considered below.

*Suggestions for an IFS-Inspired Spiritual Direction Session*

IFS offers a map of the soul and a process for personal restoration that is deeply resonant with the art of spiritual companioning. It recognizes the spiritual resources innate within the directee; it helps the directee cultivate a contemplative awareness of their own interior experience; and it invites the directee to discover and discern for themselves where the Sacred is meeting them within their experience and how the Sacred is guiding them toward greater life and love. How might a spiritual director embody the insights of IFS within a spiritual direction session? Three suggestions follow.

*1. The spiritual director accesses Self.* Essential to the work of spiritual direction is the awareness that the spiritual director has a Self essence as well. In fact, the spiritual director’s Self presence may be the most important gift we have for a directee. In spiritual direction, we are creating a space of contemplative groundedness and radical hospitality. We trust that the Sacred is present within every human experience, holding every slice of life with compassion and integrating it all into a unity of restorative love. We cultivate a space where the directee can bring any human experience; and like a miner panning for gold (Ruffing, 57), we covenant to hold that experience with attentive care, to sift through their experience with them with genuine curiosity, and to trust that the Sacred is hidden within it healing, restoring, and leading the directee into fullness of life.

This commitment necessitates our Self presence. As spiritual directors, we endeavor to cultivate within ourselves a grounded contemplative calm that is not rattled in the midst of extreme emotions and challenging topics; to sustain a genuine curiosity that is open to exploring the deep longings, fears, and wounds aching to come into the light even within difficult behaviors; to stand firm in a spine of confidence that the Sacred is present even when we are navigating through unknown territory; and to embody a radical compassion that extends care, dignity, and understanding to the persons entrusted to us. To be sure, we offer our freest and most restorative spiritual direction when we are in our best Self. And the mystery is, when we are rooted in our Self essence, we are plugged into and channels of the Sacred reality whose compassionate presence is the true source of all healing and restoration. Rosa, in her whirlwind of distress, is aching for just such a space. She longs to be with a companion who, if nothing else, will hold her with the tender caring presence that is a whisper of the Sacred. Our Self presence is the holy meeting place we invite our directees to enter. It is the tabernacle where the Sacred resides.

*2. The spiritual director tends their parts.* Spiritual directors are human beings. We have our own constellations of parts inhabiting the guest house of our inner worlds. Some are companions who have joined us in the long course of our personal journeys—they comprise the wounds we have known; the sensitivities we have developed; the roles we have taken on; the protective strategies we have habituated. As in other spheres of our lives, these parts can get activated in the midst of a spiritual direction session—a directee may express a political view that offends us, for example; they may bring up a topic that scares us; they may express some emotion we find distasteful; they may allude to a wound that is still tender within us. Other parts are more endemic to the practice of spiritual direction, parts attracted to the specific light that shines within this ministry. Common spiritual director parts that are brought to supervision include:

Fix-It Parts: Parts that want to give advice.

Critical Parts: Parts that judge, sometimes subtly, a directee’s theology, emotions,

or behavior.

Engulfed Parts: Parts that feel overwhelmed by a directee’s extreme emotion.

Encouraging Parts: Parts that want to cheerlead and lift up a directee’s spirits,

especially when the directee is discouraged.

Allying Parts: Parts that take sides when a directee is struggling with a

discernment issue, pulling for the directee to do what we think is best.

Empathic Parts: Parts that get clouded by our own versions of the feelings that a

directee is sharing with us.

Inadequate Parts: Parts that worry they are not ‘doing it right,’ or feel like they are

not being helpful.

Distracted Parts: Parts that check out for a while, perhaps preoccupied with our

own life concerns, or glazed over with a veneer of weariness.

Depending on the person companioning Rosa, one can imagine various parts that could get activated in a session with her—parts pulling for her to get ordained; parts angry at how hard it is for women in ministry; parts worried she might neglect her children; parts feeling guilty for neglecting our own; parts that judge her for being a homemaker; parts that judge her for wanting to get ordained; parts that wish she would tell off her partner; parts that want to tell her she really is gifted—the list is as long as the number of people who might be called to companion her. And we all have them—we all have parts that would like to sit in our interior chair and offer spiritual direction for us.

The invitation of IFS is to recognize that this is not only normal, this is a gift. To be sure, we need to be attentive for when a part takes over during a spiritual direction session, to notice it when it inevitably happens, and to invite it to relax so we can companion our directee from the solid ground of our free Self-presence. However, IFS recognizes that our parts show up for a reason. They are not to be judged and demonized. On the contrary, they are cries within us aching for understanding and compassionate care. We are invited, in our spiritual practice or with our own spiritual director, to tend to our own parts in precisely the same way we invite our directees to tend to theirs. In fact, this is one way that offering spiritual direction becomes our own spiritual practice. Our directees are giving us the gift of surfacing some of our own untended parts so they can be brought into the light where they can heard, honored, and restored.

*3. The spiritual director assists the directee in restoring Self-leadership and discerning the Sacred within their concrete circumstances.*

With the spiritual director grounded in their own Self-essence, bracketing their parts that are activated during a session to be tended to later, IFS offers a road map in assisting a directee to access their Self essence and discern the Sacred’s invitation for them within the circumstances of their lives. To illustrate the movements in this process, we will imagine how a director might companion Rosa through this restorative process.

The IFS-informed spiritual director would recognize that Rosa walks into the spiritual direction session possessed by her parts. The Priest, the Caregiver, the Critic, and the Free Spirit are all vying for control of Rosa’s actions. (Sometimes it is not *one* part driving the bus of our consciousness but a *mob* of parts fighting over the steering wheel.) The director might simply mirror back to Rosa that it sounds like an inner debate is going on, and invite Rosa to notice and name the different movements she has within her. Naming and noticing can help Rosa unblend from her parts, shifting from being possessed by them into an open awareness that they are simply present within her. This open awareness of her inner experience—this calm ‘I’ in the midst of the storm—would be a glimpse of the solid ground of Rosa’s true Self emerging within her.

Once Rosa is able to access at least a wedge of her true Self, with all of its latent spiritual resources, the director might then invite her to listen for the deep longings within the conflicting interior movements. Rosa may hear with clarity and conviction that she really does feel called to the ministry. She may also hear, from another of her parts, the reminder of how deeply she cares for her family, and how, whatever she does, she wants to tend her connection with her loved ones. Or perhaps she hears other things—perhaps she hears a deep-seated fear that her loved ones won’t care for her if she isn’t always meeting their needs; or perhaps she hears a hidden terror that she will be scorned if she cultivates one of her gifts; or perhaps she hears that this has nothing to do with the ordained ministry at all, that her deepest yearning is to be an instrument of God’s presence in other ways within her life.

As Rosa settles into the soul of her parts’ deep longings—as she ‘gets’ the source of their cry—her parts will relax. They are being honored; they are being heard; and they are being heard by Rosa’s true Self. Rosa’s Self—her spiritual essence—has capacities. Her Self knows when clarity has been reached, when the truth of her soul’s desires have really surfaced. Her Self has resilience—a confidence that a way can be found that leads to fullness in the various spheres of her life. And her Self is connected to the Sacred that Rosa knows. This is where the Sacred yearns to meet her—close to the bone of Rosa’s deepest longings and tender fears. The director might ask her how she senses the Sacred wanting to be with her here in the womb of her soul’s truth. And trusting that Rosa will know for herself, the director is committed to sitting with her in whatever way the Sacred meets her. Perhaps Rosa’s Sacred is confirming her call to the ministry and inspiring in her the confidence that, not only can she succeed, but that her relationships can thrive in the process. Perhaps the Sacred confirms her call but Rosa senses a season of patience that waits until the children are out of school. Perhaps the Sacred meets her in her fears—reassuring her that she is held and beloved no matter what scorn she might meet, no matter who might abandon her in the journey of her life. Such may be precisely where the Sacred most yearns to meet her right now—healing ancient wounds, assuaging old terrors, and inspiring the rock-solid confidence she needs to flourish in any sphere of her life.

As a spiritual director, we do not know where the journey will take her. Nor do we need to. We trust the Sacred to direct her, not us. Wherever Rosa’s soul leads her, and however the Sacred yearns to meet her, IFS-informed spiritual direction invites Rosa into her own process. It helps her name and notice her interior experience; it trusts her capacities to access her best Self and listen with care for the deep truth hidden within her soul; and it recognizes that the Sacred reality that heals, restores, and leads into life is dwelling within her soul as well. Rosa’s Self is a spark from that Sacred light. And her Self can sense on its own how the Sacred is meeting her and where the Sacred is leading her.

*Conclusion: Compassion-Based Spiritual Direction*

Spiritual direction is a compassion-based ministry. We give ourselves to it in the first place out of compassion—out of our deep care for the sacred souls that come to us within the sweeps and swirls of their lives. And, as IFS suggests, compassion permeates the process itself. Spiritual direction provides a space where all is welcome, where all is held in the grace of contemplative curiosity and care. This entails a radical hospitality not only to our spiritual directees, but to every part that dwells within their inner world. Like our own, each one of their parts is rooted in goodness; each one acts with positive intent; and each one aches for restoration within the harmonious whole of the soul they inhabit.

Such restoration is possible. The compassionate Self within our directees that can tend to their parts with such pitch perfect care, and the compassionate Self within us as directors that companions them in their soul work, both are infused with the compassion that sustains the entire universe. That Sacred reality holds and heals it all—Rosa, and every one of her parts; spiritual directors, and every one of our parts; indeed, every creature in the universe, and every one of the parts within them. And that Sacred reality is the true director, the cosmic Self in whose presence we know—all is held, and all will be held, with the compassion that restores all things.

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