

Spiritual Teacher

Carroll E. Arkema

*“The wind blows where it chooses,
And you hear the sound of it,
But you do not know where
It comes from, or where it goes.
So it is with everyone who
Is born of the Spirit.”¹*

*When it appears,
One’s breath knows
Immediately,
But one’s mind gets it
Most clearly in hindsight,
Even if only seconds after,
leaving one breathless.*

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When one begins to talk about it—
 And while doing so—
 Something surges
 From deep within, rising
 Along the alimentary canal
 In inverse direction of digestion—
 A hot and molten feeling which
 Leads to tears and choking
 As its power overtakes one,
 Like a fiery pillar
 Deeply grounded
 In the body's core
 Conducting molten energy
 Near enough the heart
 To make it glow
 And the lungs to quicken
 With gasping breath
 As the words come.

One's mind is awed, exalted,
 Partaking of a wisdom
 Far beyond one's ken
 Yet known within—
 Seeking a receptive
 Respectful audience
 Willing to be moved,
 To have one's hair
 Stand on end
 As one listens
 With faint then stronger
 Recognition to
 Live Spirit within.

 I received the usual
 Pre-Christmas floods of mail:
 Catalogues, letters, emails—
 Begging for purchases
 Or year-end contributions.

*I put one such letter aside
 As I tried to assess
 Which pleas would survive the cut
 Of recipients worthy of a contribution.*

*That letter lay there
 On my computer desk
 For three or four weeks
 As Christmas drew nigh.*

*Meanwhile, into my office
 Comes my therapy patient John ²
 On his ongoing journey
 Seeking mind, spirit, body unity
 In his personal life,
 Relationships, and vocation,
 Beset of course by doubts
 And vulnerable
 To quick-fix drugs and sex.*

*Today he gets right to it:
 Says he's aware of missing
 A spiritual teacher—that
 He's never really had one.*

*I begin to feel anxious,
 Yet also on alert,
 Guessing that
 He's coming to me for that,
 Even if not consciously.*

*I feel inadequate, thinking
 It's not exactly my definition
 Of what I'm about,
 And wondering "Have I
 Ever had a spiritual teacher?"*

*He's not asking me yet,
 Directly, if I'll be his teacher;
 Rather, he goes on to
 Tell me a story of
 Him and his friend enjoying
 Boxing with each other.*

*One day while doing so,
 His friend broke
 A small bone in his hand.
 "Immediately I felt guilty,"
 John said to me, "because
 Just a few days earlier
 I had had the thought 'We
 Should wrap our hands
 Before putting on our gloves,'
 But I hadn't said anything.
 Now he breaks his bone!
 I felt responsible."*

*We discussed other things
 In that therapy session,
 But at a timely moment
 Near the end, I said,
 "Back to what you said
 About missing a spiritual teacher:
 I'm realizing that I've never had
 Just one spiritual teacher myself.
 But you've gotten me thinking
 That through the years,
 A few key people have
 Profoundly influenced me—
 Both by what they said
 As well as with the loving energy
 With which it was conveyed
 And the timing of what they said.*

*Those have been my spiritual teachers,
 And I guess I've taken them inside—
 They've become part of who I am,
 And influence how I live.*

*You've told me about people
 Like that in your life
 Whom you remember,
 Whose influence has helped
 Things in your life to come together.*

*More and more over time
 You can become
 Your own spiritual teacher—
 The more you trust
 Your intuition,
 The Spirit within.*

*Your inner teacher
 Was speaking when
 You had that thought
 Before boxing with your friend
 That you should wrap your hands.*

*You can increasingly
 Pay attention
 To those intimations."*

*He agreed, understood—
 Heard this not as criticism
 But affirmation,
 As information
 Which could help him
 Listen to his
 Inner Teacher
 In the future.*

We talked of other
 Related things, and
 As he was leaving—
 While paying me
 In cash as he always does—
 He asked me if I
 Contribute to charities.
 “Yes, sure,” I said.
 He asked which ones.
 I stumbled, said
 “A couple of churches,
 Other organizations
 I can’t recall at
 The moment.” I was thinking
 Also it was not his business.

He intuited my discomfort,
 Said immediately,
 “It doesn’t matter;
 Would you be willing—
 If I gave you an extra fifty—
 To give it to a charity
 Of your choosing?”

I was speechless,
 Stirred deep within,
 Felt Spirit moving,
 Blowing.
 I swallowed, choked,
 Said, “Sure, I’ll do that.”

Yes, clinically, one could
 Say that I was “enabling” him—
 Doing this for him instead
 Of encouraging him
 To do it on his own,
 To trust his inner
 Spiritual Teacher.

*But I sensed it was something
 About our relationship that
 He wanted to honor.
 Autonomy would come later.*

*I felt deeply connected with him,
 Both within, but also outside,
 Beyond, or underneath
 The framework of therapy.*

*Beyond my fee,
 He was giving a gift
 Both to me and through me—
 Entrusting the wind which
 Would blow the blessing
 Where it willed, while
 Giving us each a thrill.*

*In that spontaneous moment
 His Spiritual Teacher spoke
 To the One in me.
 Our hearts were joined
 In what transcended
 The therapeutic framework
 While being therapeutic.
 We both were fed
 And nurtured by Spirit
 Within us,
 Between us,
 And in the room.*

*That evening at home, sitting
 In front of my computer,
 I suddenly saw that letter—
 The one I'd left there
 For three or four weeks.*

*It all came together!
 The Spirit like the wind
 Had been blowing,
 Had led me to
 Put that letter aside
 For a time,
 And in that moment
 I knew that it was precisely
 That Charity I was supposed
 To give his money to.³*

*Which I did; and what
 A fulfilling, awed,
 And restful feeling of
 Completion I've had.*

*I sent him an email
 Informing him
 Of the completion of
 What his Spiritual Teacher
 Through us both had done.*

*We'll see what happens next.
 It may be mostly more
 Routine, but things will
 Never be the same
 With him or me
 Ever again.*

NOTES

1. John 3:18 (NRSV)
2. Identifying information has been changed.
3. Vacation from War.