

# Spiritual Discernment: How to Choose Wisely in Challenging Times

by Rev. Elke Siller Macartney

*(I was prompted to write the following essay because of an event I recently witnessed involving a so-called shaman convincing an audience of his spiritual prowess and the healing power of an object he was selling. In other words, I witnessed a spiritual and commercial con-artist in action. I hope the following is useful information for you as you make your way on the path.)*

It's clear: We are all involved in times when everything is changing. We communicate in ways never before available to us. We blog, instant message, "Twitter," text, YouTube and chat. In our medical and healing sciences, new discoveries are made every day, and the array of choices are astounding. And then we have our spiritual paths: There are spiritual teachers, books, communities and events that can inform, serve, and inspire us. As well though, there are people and groups who use fear tactics to take advantage of us. Among all the options to learn, grow and to heal, how do we choose wisely?

Of course I do not have all the answers to this, but I will share a few considerations as we all proceed to create our individual and collective future.

• **Check in with yourself.**

Note how you feel. If you're given options in healing modalities or teachings or investments of time, energy, or money, check out your gut. I mean this most literally. What is it you are feeling in your tummy area, otherwise

known as your solar plexus chakra? Do you have a sinking feeling? Did your stomach lurch or was there a sensation of a "sock to the gut?" If there is even a minor reaction, pay attention and ask yourself, "Why? What is going on?" There is a reason to pay attention to your gut. In the realm of human events, wiser men and women have paid attention to their initial instinct. I understand how this may sound simplistic, and it is. But I cannot count the number of times when my initial "hit" was the correct one.

Note the beliefs you are operating from. Sometimes our beliefs assist us in our choices, often times they fall short. A healthy dose of belief checking once in awhile allows us to re-consider our options from a place of neutrality and wisdom, rather than stale or no longer useful beliefs.

Trust yourself. Too often I've made choices that have gone sideways because I did not trust myself to make the correct choice for me. My choice may not be your choice. My choice may not be status quo. Others might even deride me for my choices. Yet in the realm of a free-will planet, all our choices ultimately come down to this: Whom do you trust?

• **Check out the source.**

From whom is this opportunity/choice/healing coming from? If it's an individual person acting as a teacher or healer or source of choices, here are some considerations:

Are the options coming from a reliable source? Obviously, if this is a known entity

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to yourself or others you trust, then you can proceed with some confidence. Check in with your gut anyway.

Does the person use his/her power to empower or to have power over? This is a subjective call. Some assertive people have our best interests in mind, but even so, the need to have power over others is often a dangerous need. Dictators, cult leaders and false practitioners offer up what might seem as solid solutions to your current situation. We like "take-charge" people. But is the take-charge attitude turning into a "takeover?"

Beware of judgmental statements. I have known so-called healers tell their clients, "If you don't do what I tell you to do, you are going to die/get sick/regret." This has serious consequences. The power of suggestion can never be underestimated. A true teacher/healer/advisor gives you information, and then

empowers you to come to your own conclusions, your own choices. You do not have to be intimidated to make a choice.

Listen to their words, and also listen to what is NOT being said. If the words do not make sense, or there seems to be missing information, ask questions. If their answers are not satisfactory to you, walk away and re-consider.

• **Check out the teachings or choices as you put them into practice.**

How do you feel? Enlivened? Less fearful? Healthier, or at least getting well? In other words, is it working for you? If not, why? Example: A few years ago, a client of mine came to me for counsel after two years of trying "holistic healing techniques" in order to cure her kidney tumor. By the time she arrived in my office, the tumor had grown to such an extent, it had created a protruding belly on her slender frame. She looked seven months pregnant. As she explained her two-year regimen involving a strict diet, Oriental medicine treatments, as well as seeing a renowned healer, she was understandably discouraged. I asked her what turned out to be an important question: "Is what you are doing working?"

At first she was stunned by the question and murmured something about wanting to be holistic and so forth. I gently suggested she answer the question with a simple yes or no. After she admitted, "No, it isn't working," we discussed other options, including surgery.

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