

# THE INNER COMPASS

If you have ever done any hill-walking you will know how it feels when the fog comes down and you can't see a step in front of you. The guidebooks are useless, because you can't see any landmarks. You may go round in frantic circles. You may even have a serious fall. The same sort of thing can happen on our inner journey. The clouds of desolation can descend. We forget the significant landmarks of our faith journey. We lose our distant vision.

A wise walker, lost on the mountains, will turn to the compass when this happens, and for the inner journey there is a compass too. It is the tool we might call *discernment*. Discernment grows out of the habit of reflecting on our daily experience and noticing the points of consolation and desolation – seeing each day where God is active in our lives and making choices in line with the deepest centre of ourselves, where we are at one with him. We might summarise the skill of using this inner compass like this:

- We need to be able to find it! This means that we need to be at home with our moods and skilled in recognising consolation and desolation, and responding accordingly. This skill needs to be primed and ready in our hearts – not twenty miles away in our heads!
- We need to use the inner compass along with the map of our personal life experience. This “map” reflects our distant vision – the landmarks we know from the times when we could see, because the weather was clear.
- And thirdly, to use this tool of discernment, we need to be able to come to inner stillness. Only in the still centre of our hearts will our inner compass read true north.
- Finally, we must *trust* the compass and follow where it points.

## Walking by the stars

Just as we can refer to our “inner compass” as a guide to discerning where and when we are travelling “true North” on the inner journey and when we are going off course, so too we each have a personal set of “constellations” in our inner sky, that can also help us find our way to what is most true within us. These are the constellations of our own *experience*. These may be clusters of fear or anxieties to which we are particularly prone, or they may be areas of especial giftedness in our lives, ways of praying that seem consistently to bring us closer to God, or aspects of our way of relating to others that tend to have either creative or destructive effects. Whether positive or negative, these personal patterns of being can be invaluable aids in steering our course in the dark.

*What has happened during the past few weeks (or in earlier times of your life) that has left you feeling that you were “on shifting sand”? Remember the turmoil you felt then. Ask God to heal you of its effects. What has happened that made you feel you were “on solid ground”? Notice what gave rise to that good feeling, and how you acted on it. Don't judge yourself. Just notice your feelings and reactions.*

*Remember, in prayer, the time(s) when you have “turned round” to face God, perhaps after a time in the darkness of your own shadow. Thank God for these turning points. Notice the difference that “turning” has made to your life and relationships since then.*

*Try identifying one cluster of gifts within your experience, and one cluster of fears. With this insight you can use your discernment to nurture the gifts and seek freedom from the tyranny of the fears.*

By Margaret Silf