

LISTen

A RESOURCE FOR SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS & COMPANIONS



JANUARY 2026 VOLUME 20 ISSUE 1

WHEN THE BELL SOUNDS

Answering the Call of Spiritual Companionship
by Rev. SeiFu Singh-Molares

"The world is vast and wide. Why do you put on your seven-piece robe at the sound of the bell?" (Mumonkan, Case 16)

enter practice. In spiritual companionship, a similar bell rings: the quiet inner prompting, the pleas of those we companion, all of our spiritual longing for Presence. Why do we answer, session after session, year after year? In the face of so many of the difficulties that accompany our calling?

Because what else would we do? We who have heard that deepest of calls—to serve the greater purpose of Love and Kindness—cannot turn away when the sound arrives. To ignore it would be to dim the very light we are called to carry.



In a world vast and wide, stretched increasingly thin by conflict, grief, and disconnection, a bell sounds. Not once, but repeatedly. Zen Master Yunmen's question echoes across centuries: "The world is vast and wide. Why do you put on your seven-piece robe at the sound of the bell?" In the temple, the bell calls practitioners to rise, robe themselves, and

The bell does not demand grandiose gestures or perfection of any kind; it asks only for response. Each time it sounds, we drape ourselves in our calling, by listening, witnessing, and willingly accompanying others amidst their sorrow, pain, alienation, and spiritual yearning. The world offers unending distractions, scrolling feeds, numbing escapes, solitary retreats into self, but spiritual companionship chooses otherwise. We answer because Love compels us. Kindness is not an occasional act but a sustained vow, renewed with every encounter. By providing support, we offer not

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WHEN THE BELL SOUNDS (CONTINUED)

escape from suffering but a shared space where pain and heartbreak can be met, witnessed, fertilized and harvested, and held without being fixed or fled. This repeated response becomes the vows we embody: simple, deliberate, radiant in their ordinariness, and fierce in their determination.

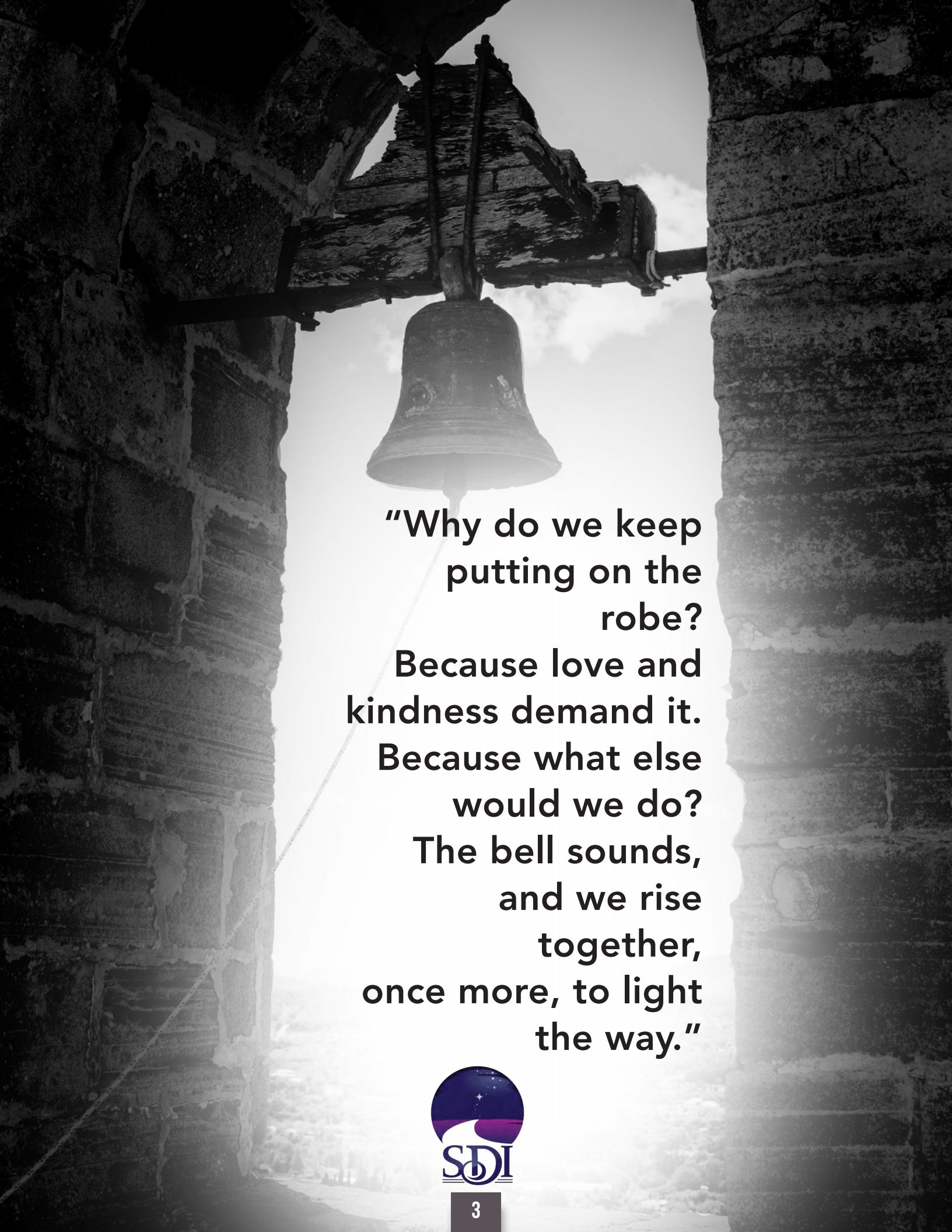
Yet the vastness of the world does tempt withdrawal. Why engage when isolation can feel safer, and where alienation and burnout are very real consequences? The bell pierces this hesitation. The “robe” of our calling is not a restriction; it is willingness and readiness. We keep answering because turning away would betray our vows, the interdependence at the heart of existence, our shared vulnerability, and our common longing for connection. We keep showing up as spiritual companions because we honour the divine, the transcendent, God, the Universe, or however we might label the ground of all being. We are faithful, reverent and humble, after all. And we have been “baptized” by the beyond in such a way that precludes us ever turning away from it. Alienation thrives in silence and separation; companionship counters it by showing up, as many times as needed. Through deep listening, we relieve not all pain, but the sharper edge of being alone in it. We offer solace from sorrow by reminding those we accompany: “You are seen. Your suffering matters.” In this act, love manifests as presence, and kindness as persistence.

And so, the bell keeps sounding, in personal crises, in collective wounds, in the quiet moments when someone reaches out for guidance. We who are called to this work answer because the alternative is unthinkable: a world left darker, more fragmented, more lonely. Each response lights a small, steady flame against the vast night. Spiritual companionship, nurtured in our beloved community, multiplies these flames across traditions, orientations, and divides.



Why do we keep putting on the robe? Because love and kindness demand it. Because what else would we do? The bell sounds, and we rise together, once more, to light the way.





**"Why do we keep
putting on the
robe?
Because love and
kindness demand it.
Because what else
would we do?
The bell sounds,
and we rise
together,
once more, to light
the way."**



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DEEP LIKE OCEAN SIGHS

by Steven Crandell

Betwixt and between
the seen and unseen,
unraveling is
knitting anew.

Remember that what
we cannot fold or cut
we cannot file or pin
we cannot open or shut
lies deep like ocean sighs

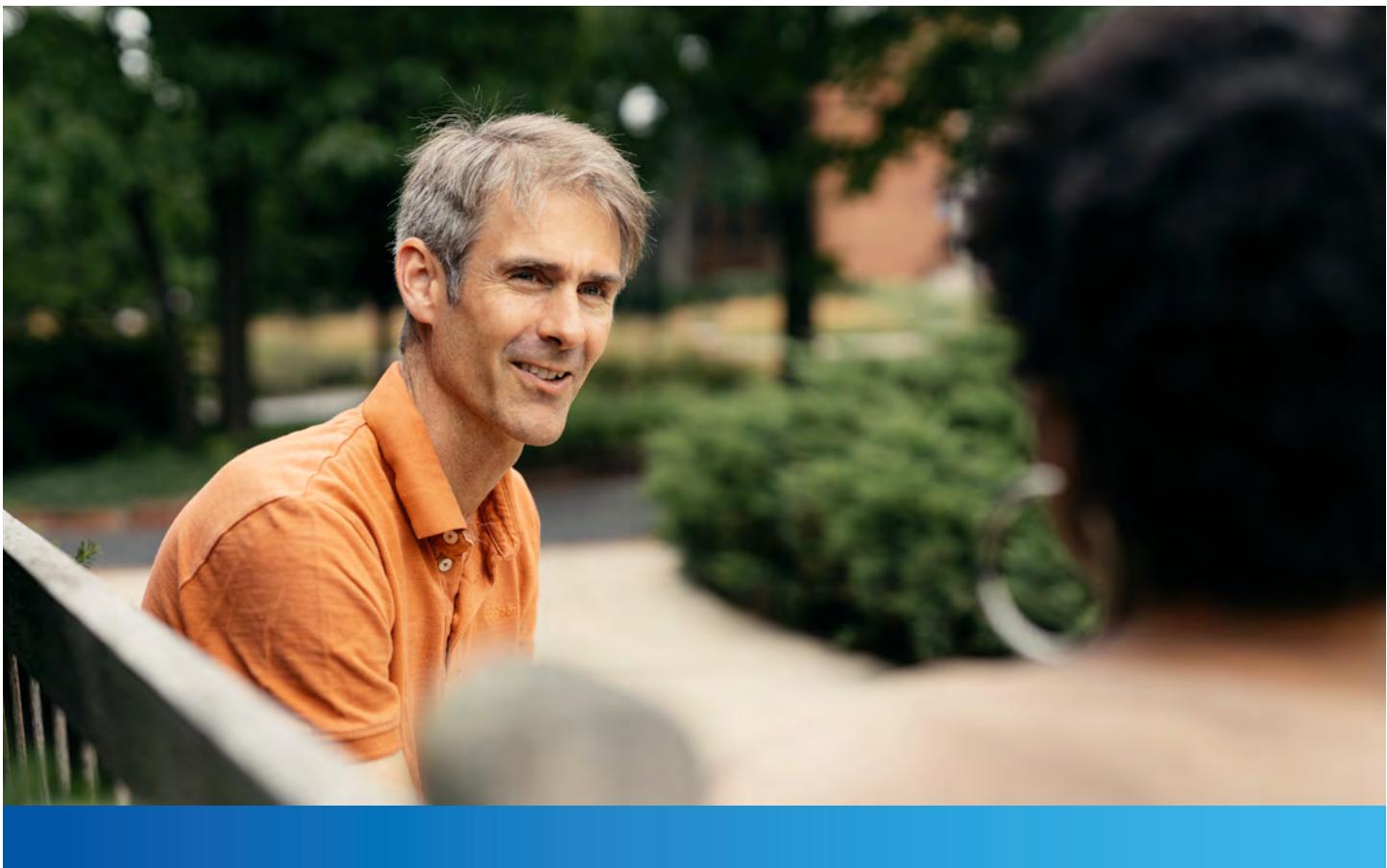
of sand and current
and rock and bone
and roots and stalks
of seaweed beds.

Swim in the watery twilight.
Can you feel
the swaying, swirling,
shaping, shifting,
the holding and unfurling?

Here in the heart of things
in the depth of things,
where the stillness is nothing but
movement

And peace is an infinite birthing.

Steven Crandell is a writer. He works for an hourly wage in the Pacific Northwest, fulfilling his destiny to serve, heal and celebrate life. He writes "Confessions of a Supermarket Cashier" on LinkedIn.



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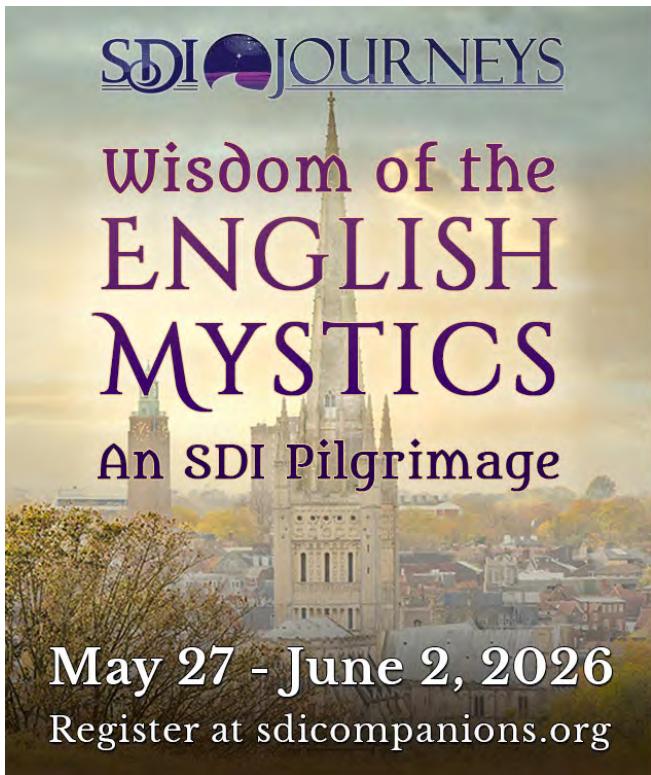


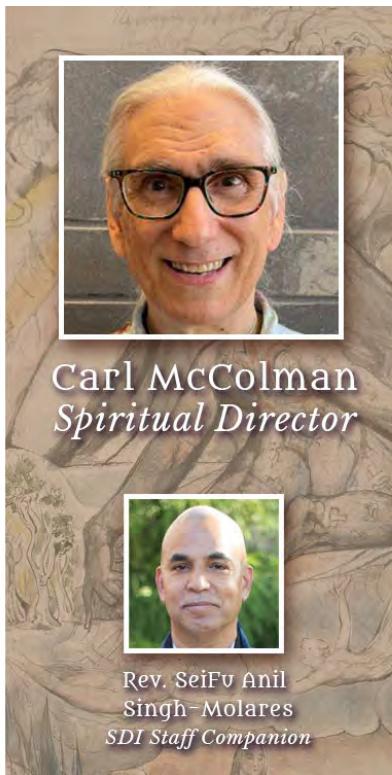
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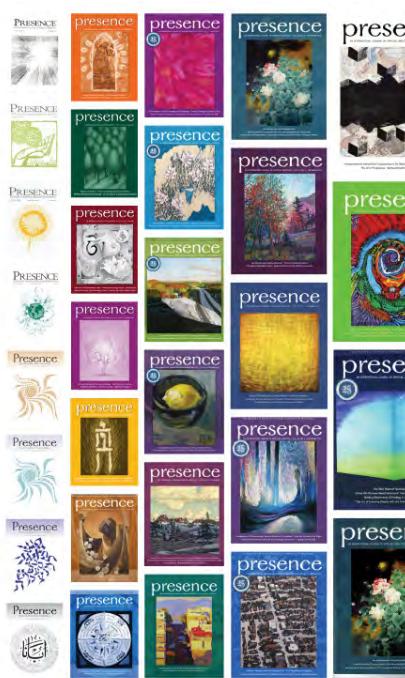
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Matthew 5:14-16 (NIV):

“You are the light of the world.
A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.
Neither do people light a lamp
and put it under a bowl.
Instead they put it on its stand,
and it gives light to everyone in the house.
In the same way,
let your light shine unto others.”





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