

## **The Use of Somatic Experiencing in the Discernment of Spirits in Spiritual Direction**

Veronica Lai

**Abstract:** St. Ignatius of Loyola, wrote the Spirit Exercises with the purpose to save souls. From his own conversion experience on the recovery bed, he discovered two opposite forces in operation– the good and bad spirits. He wrote down the Rules for the Discernment of Spirits for spiritual directors. Discernment is not a linear process.

Five centuries have passed since the birth of this saint; thanks to the diligent work of many experts and practitioners in different disciplines, and the breakthrough in medical technologies like imaging, we acquired more knowledge and understanding of human beings, able to see what was invisible inside the human bodies – the energy flow, the movements of neurons, blood flow, brain cells, etc.

This paper articulates the development of significant neuroscience findings and the use of Somatic Experiencing, a body-based trauma healing model developed by Peter Levine in the process of discernment of spirits in spiritual direction. Two case studies are included to illustrate the examination process.

**Keywords:** Spiritual Exercises, Discernment of Spirits, Somatic Experiencing, Neuroscience

St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) wrote the *Spiritual Exercises* with the purpose to save souls. From his own conversion experience on the recovery bed, he experienced and discovered two opposite forces in operation—the good and bad spirits. By revisiting and re-examining the details of his dreams, he detected and differentiated the dynamics of the two spirits, hence he formulated the Rules for the Discernment of Spirits for spiritual directors. Discernment is not a linear process; “one needs to be generally sensitive to the whole fluid and elusive realm of one’s feelings and reactions.”<sup>1</sup>

As noted in the Fifth Rule of “Rules for the Discernment of Spirits” in the Second Week of the *Spiritual Exercises* [SE 333],<sup>2</sup>

We must pay close attention to the whole course of our thoughts: if the beginning, middle and end are entirely good and tend towards what is wholly right, this is a sign of the good angel. But if the course of the thoughts suggested to us leads us finally to something bad or distracting, or less good than what one had previously intended to do, or if in the end the soul is weakened, upset or distressed, losing the peace, tranquility and quiet previously experienced—all this is a clear sign of the bad spirit, the enemy of our progress and eternal well-being.<sup>3</sup>

How to pay close attention to the whole course of our thoughts? What are the things to look out for? What are the signs to be aware of? What are the elements of the movements?

In the past century, psychology was the major scientific discipline that studied the human mind and behavior. Thanks to the dedication and diligent work of experts and practitioners in different disciplines, plus the breakthrough

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Ivens, SJ., *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises* (London: Morehouse Group, 2000), 206.

<sup>2</sup> References to the text of the *Spiritual Exercises* in this article are given in square brackets [SE, followed by the numbered paragraph(s)].

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

in medical technologies like imaging, these advances enable and encourage more inter-disciplinary collaboration to study the human being as a whole organism, not as individual parts or systems. In the 1950s, Francis Schmitt established the first neuroscience research program in the Biology Department at the Massachusetts of Technology, bringing together biology, chemistry, physics, and mathematics. Since then the scope of neuroscience has been broadened, embracing different approaches to study the biological basis of learning, memory, behavior, perception and consciousness. These new findings of the functions of the brain and of the nervous system enable a new paradigm for the seemingly non-related disciplines to collaborate together, to name just a few: neuroethology, neuropsychology, neuroeconomics... even neurotheology. Peter Levine, developer of Somatic Experiencing received his doctoral degree in medical biophysics and holds a doctorate in psychology; he devoted his passion and time to study the impact of trauma on the nervous system. Somatic Experiencing is a body-oriented trauma healing model based on a multidisciplinary knowledge of physiology, psychology, ethology, biology, neuroscience, indigenous healing practices and medical biophysics.<sup>4</sup>

In this paper, I am going to examine some significant milestones of findings in neuroscience to explain some Ignatian terms such as *sentir*, and the “application of the senses” and how to apply Somatic Experiencing as an approach to the discernment of spirits in spiritual direction.

## **I. Significant Milestones of Neuroscientific Findings**

*The Word became flesh.*

*A mystery.*

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<sup>4</sup> “What is Somatic Experiencing?” accessed June 18, 2020, <https://traumahealing.org/se-101/>.

How much do we understand how the human body functions? From basic survival for food, safety and procreation to more sophisticated abstract thinking, creativity and searching for the meaning of life?

Many people know Charles Darwin (1809-1882) published his theory of evolution in his book *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, but few know that he was also among the first psychologists to study human psychology. In 1872, he published *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*; his findings inspired many psychologists to conduct research in this area and today “many agree that certain emotions are universal to all humans, regardless of culture: anger, fear, surprise, disgust, happiness and sadness.”<sup>5</sup>

### **1. How Does the Brain Function?**

*It is a long and winding road to understand the human brain and behavior.*

For centuries, René Descartes (1596-1650), a French philosopher, whose idea that human beings are “a thinking thing” and that there exists a body-mind dualism had a significant influence on earlier philosophers, theologians and physicists. However, in 1948, Paul Ivan Yakovlev (1894-1983), a Russian-born neuropathologist, published a paper titled *Motility, behavior and the brain; stereodynamic organization and neural coordinates of behavior*, challenged the traditional Cartesian view that the thinking brain was the control center. Yakovlev argued that “the innermost and evolutionarily most primitive brain structures in the brain stem and hypothalamus are those that regulate the internal states through autonomic control of the viscera and blood vessels.... The most primitive system forms the matrix upon which the

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<sup>5</sup> Ferris Jabr, “The Evolution of Emotion: Charles Darwin’s little-known psychology experiment,” *Scientific American*, May 24, 2010, <https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/the-evolution-of-emotion-charles-darwins-little-known-psychology-experiment/>.

remainder of the brain, as well as behavior is elaborated.”<sup>6</sup> His theory upset the top-down model that it was the “higher” thinking brain that controlled the “lower” functions of the body, such as the digestive system. His research opened a whole new dimension to understanding how the human organism functions, how the mind and body are interconnected instead of being distinct parts, and that “we feel and think with our guts.”<sup>7</sup>

The human nervous system conducts stimuli from sensory receptors to the brain and spinal cord, and conducts impulses back to other parts of the body. It has two main parts: the central nervous system (the brain and spinal cord) and the peripheral nervous system (the nerves that carry impulses to and from the central nervous system).

## 2. The Triune Brain Model

Another important figure who provided a new map for modern neuroscientists to study brain functions was Paul MacLean (1913-2007), an American physician and neuroscientist, who formulated the Triune Brain Model in the 1960s.

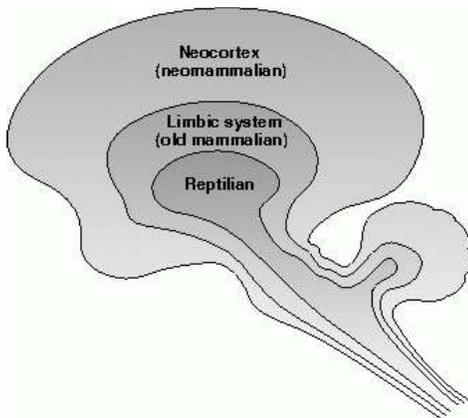


Figure 1. Paul Maclean's Triune Brain<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2010), 252-253.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>8</sup> Credit: PAFCA, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

His research showed that the human brain was in reality three brains in one: neo-cortex, limbic system, and reptilian complex. “Although these fundamental brain structures show differences in structure and chemistry, all three intermesh and are meant to function together as a unitary (triune) brain.”<sup>9</sup>

The basic functions of the triune brain:

- i. Neocortex: thinking, conscious memory, symbols, planning and inhibition of impulses
- ii. Limbic system: feelings, motivation, interaction and relationship
- iii. Reptilian complex: sensations, arousal-regulation (homeostasis) and initiation of movement impulses.<sup>10</sup>

This simple model illustrated the functions of different parts of the brain. The implication is that each part requires different languages for communication. For the limbic system, we use the language of feelings such as happy, delighted, excited, panic, anxious, surprise, shock, sad, lonely, disgust, being loved, angry, etc. For the reptilian complex, we use the language of sensations such as tingling, shaking, hot, cold, warm, dry, wet, sticky, electric shock, goose bump, open, numb, expanding, constricting, burning, itchy, sweaty, etc.<sup>11</sup> When we engage the triune brain to describe one experience, it may sound like this: when I remember the first trip to Paris with my good friends, I still feel the excitement and joy; my chest relaxes, the heart beats a little faster; I take a deep breath with a smile on my face.

### **3. The Five Senses**

How do we understand and perceive the world? It is through the five senses: taste, smell, touch, hearing, and sight. The stimuli from each sensing

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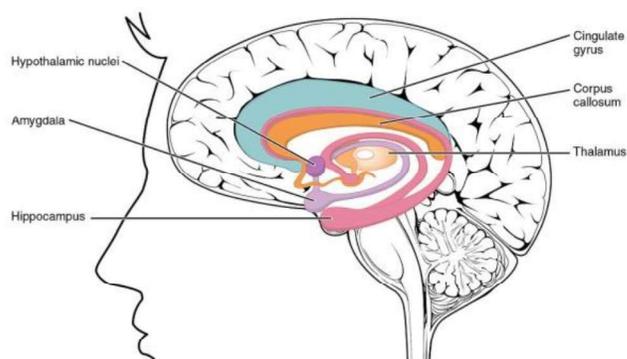
<sup>9</sup> Peter Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice*, 256.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Levine, *Somatic Experiencing Beginning Year Manual* (Boulder, CO: Somatic Experiencing Trauma Institute, 1997), 28-29.

organ in the body are relayed to different parts of the brain through the nervous system.

The limbic system plays a vital role in sensory perception, sensory interpretation and motor function. The amygdala, for example, receives sensory signals from the thalamus and uses the information in the processing of emotions such as fear, anger, and pleasure. It also determines what memories are stored and where the memories are stored in the brain.<sup>12</sup>



“The limbic lobe”; OpenStax College, CC BY 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons

### **The Invention of Medical Technology**

The medical invention of Positron Emission Tomography (PET) in the 1960s and other imaging technologies like functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) provide an important tool for researchers to ‘observe’ that the triune brain is in action throughout the whole body via the nervous system, not just in the head. Any thoughts in the mind, feelings or sensation in the body are interconnected and affect each other. We can now actually see what was invisible inside the body—the energy flow, blood vessels, how and which neurons are “fired or charged” and where in the body when a thought arises, or

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<sup>12</sup> See the senses’ map figure in R. Bailey, *Overview of Five Senses*, Thought Co., updated July 16, 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/five-senses-and-how-they-work-3888470/>.

when there is a sensation—that leads to many studies on body processes like the one mentioned below—a bodily map of emotions.

### 5. A Bodily Map of Emotions

In 2014, Lauri Nummenmaa, Enrico Glerean, Riitta Hari, and Jari K. Hietanen conducted a research using a topographical self-report tool to reveal how different emotional states are associated with distinct bodily sensations as shown in the following figure<sup>13</sup>:

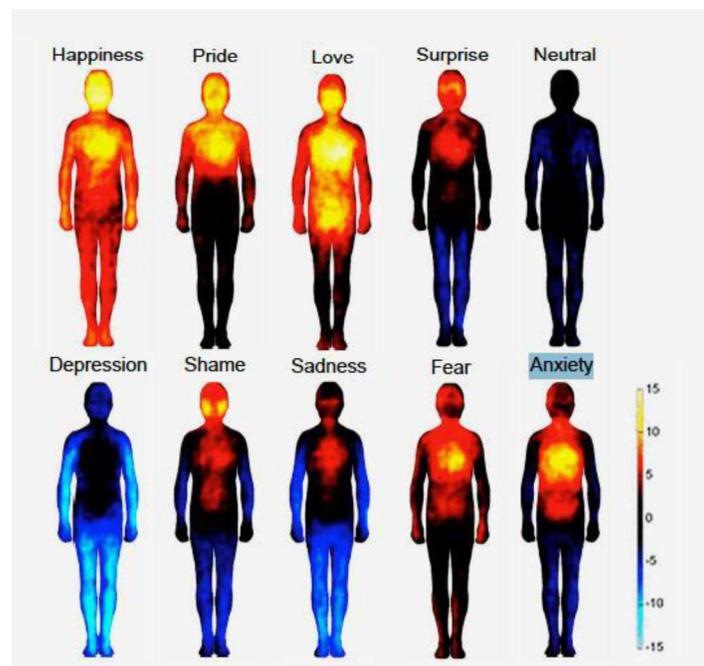


Figure 3: Bodily topography of basic (Upper) and non-basic (Lower) emotions associated with words. The body maps show regions whose activation increase (warm colors) or decreased (cool colors) when feeling each emotion.

( $P < 0.05$  FDR corrected;  $t > 1.94$ ). The color bar indicates the t-statistic range.

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<sup>13</sup> Lauri Nummenmaa et al. “Bodily Maps of Emotions,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, January 14, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1321664111>. (Editor’s note: *The Bodily Map of Emotions is originally in color. You can visit the reference link to view the original image which is Fig. 2 in that article.*)

The findings suggest that emotions are in motion. Emotions are not something to talk about, they are processes happening on different body levels; they are whole body experience.

These researches continue to reveal that the mystery of the brain is not hardwired or fixed, but is plastic and changes in structure with changes in thoughts, feelings and behaviors. This neuroplasticity of the brain brings new hope for healing diseases, trauma and the well-being of human being.

## **II. Why are these Neuroscientific Findings about the Functions of the Brain Important in Spiritual Direction?**

St Ignatius of Loyola who lived in the 16<sup>th</sup> century did not have access to our knowledge of neuroscience today, but when he wrote the *Spiritual Exercises*, he put much emphasis on *sentir* which covers a combination of the bodily senses, the affectivity and the understanding<sup>14</sup> (now we know they are the functions of the triune brain). He emphasized the essence of obtaining “interior knowledge—for it is not much knowledge but the inner feeling and relish of things that fills and satisfies the soul”<sup>15</sup> and the Prayer of the Senses<sup>16</sup> in the *Spiritual Exercises*. It is the full body experience both inside our bodies and of events from the outside that are important in the spiritual journey. What St Ignatius deemed to be important in our human experience is now proven by neuroscientists and psychologists.

When St. Ignatius was lying on his sick bed dreaming about following Christ to save souls and chasing the young lady for his personal glory, he

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<sup>14</sup> Antonio Guillen, ‘Imitating Christ our Lord with the Senses,’ *The Way* 47, no. 1 (2008), 225-241.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercise*, 4.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

experienced two forces working within him—the good and bad spirits. They pulled him in different directions and affected him differently as regards his feelings, bodily sensation and the meaning of his life. He spent months, not days or weeks during his recovery to examine, re-visit, and re-examine the details of his dreams, then he could detect and differentiate the dynamics of the two spirits. He gradually identified the behaviors of the good spirits “like a drop of water penetrating a sponge” or the bad spirits “like a drop of water falling upon a stone.”<sup>17</sup> The more we are familiar with the knowledge of these spirits’ dynamic, the better we can discern and follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

### **1. How to Track the Directee’s Emotions and Body Behavior in Spiritual Direction?**

In spiritual direction, we usually listen and pay attention to the directees’ stories, without taking notice of their bodily experience. Fr. William Johnston, S.J., in his book *The Mirror Mind* (1981), observed on the spiritual direction process, “Now let me add that this process of listening is not complete until one learns to listen also to the body.”<sup>18</sup> He also said, “Language/word, beliefs affect our body/posture... look at a very pious one obeying the ten commandments..., the Pharisees...even Paul, how rigid they were in action, no flexibility, only in the extreme, muscle and joints are locked.”<sup>19</sup> The question is “How to listen to the body?”

### **2. Somatic Experiencing**

Since the 1960s, there are more and more body-based psychotherapy models developed to heal trauma and resolve stress disorders. Eugene

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<sup>17</sup> Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 234-235.

<sup>18</sup> William Johnston, *The Mirror Mind: Spirituality & Transformation* (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1983), 60.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 75.

Gendlin developed the Focusing Psychotherapy approach, and introduced a new term “felt-sense” which provides a language to describe the innate body-felt experience.<sup>20</sup>

Somatic Experiencing is a body-oriented trauma healing method developed by Peter Levine in the 1970s. Somatic Experiencing focuses on the “felt sense” in the present moment to relieve the physical, emotional and physiological effects of post-traumatic stress disorder and other stress- and trauma-related health problems.”<sup>21</sup> This model is based on other research findings such as the Triune Brain theory by Paul MacLean and the Polyvagal theory by Stephen Porges. Levine explains how the autonomic nervous system behaves in different fight-flight-freeze situations and develops different ways to resolve trauma. I find some of the techniques of Somatic Experiencing, namely SIBAM (to be explained below), the Tracking and the Vocabulary of Sensations useful in spiritual direction, especially in the discernment of spirits. Other psychological and counselling models like Cognitive-Behavioral therapy, or Person-Centered therapy do not emphasize bodily sensations which we now know in neuroscience constitute a significant part of the human experience. In addition, Somatic Experiencing addresses the elements of voluntary and involuntary, conscious and unconscious, individual and collective experiences that are essential in examining the whole process of the movements of the soul:

By the term *movements of the soul* the Exercises refer to the interactions of feelings, thoughts and impulses of attraction and recoil, which occur spontaneously in consciousness. It should be remembered that these movements consist in thoughts as well as feelings, “thoughts” in this context being not dispassionate or solely

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<sup>20</sup> *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Eugene T. Gendlin,” accessed June 18, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugene\\_Gendlin/](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugene_Gendlin/).

<sup>21</sup> “What is Somatic Experiencing?” accessed October 11, 2021, <http://www.seaustralia.com.au/what-is-somatic-experiencing/>.

speculative thoughts, but thoughts as it were “charged” with feeling. In the vocabulary of the Exercises, “thoughts” also include the activity in the imagination.<sup>22</sup>

## **SIBAM**

Peter Levine developed this framework to “track” his clients when they were processing experiences. SIBAM stands for **S**sensation, **I**mage, **B**ehavior, **A**ffect and **M**eaning. The SIBAM model incorporates the neurophysiologic, somatic, sensory, behavioral and affective aspects of an individual’s experience:

SIBAM is the essence of “bottom-up,” sensorimotor processing aimed at guiding the client through different “languages” and brain systems, from the most primitive to the most complex; from physical sensations to feelings, perceptions and finally to thoughts.<sup>23</sup>

When we attend to the phenomena of these five elements both inside and outside the body, we can gain important information to process our experience in greater detail. One particular sensation is always connected to that image, to that behavior, to that affect and to that meaning.

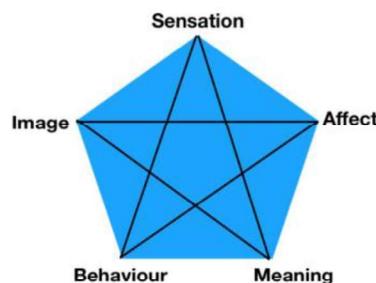


Figure 4: SIBAM Model<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercise*, 210.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice*, 139

<sup>24</sup> Pedro Prado, Lecture notes on Hong Kong Somatic Experiencing Training Beginning II Level (November 14-22, 2020).

Among the five elements of SIBAM, except for the Behavior level that can be observed directly, other elements are reported by the clients. In brief, SIBAM covers the following:

**Sensation** refers to interoceptive (from receptors lying in the interior of our organisms), physical sensations that arise from within the body (from the most conscious to the least conscious) including:

- Kinesthetic – muscle tension patterns
- Proprioceptive – awareness of our position in space
- Vestibular – acceleration and deceleration
- Visceral – sensations from the viscera (guts, heart, and lungs) and blood vessels which involve the functions of the vagus nerve that connects the brain stem to most of our internal organs. According to the Polyvagal Theory by Stephen Porges, “this vagus nerve is second only to the spinal cord in total number of neurons. Over 90% of these fibres are afferent, relaying information from our guts upward to our brains. Thus, the colloquialisms ‘gut instinct,’ ‘gut feelings’ do have a robust anatomical and physiological basis. For example: When we feel relaxed, our blood vessels and viscera gently pulse like jellyfish, causing sensations of warmth. When the vessels and viscera are constricted, we feel cold and anxious.”<sup>25</sup> Please refer to the above-mentioned “Bodily Map of Emotions” in which different emotional states are associated with distinct bodily sensations.
- The Vocabulary of Sensations<sup>26</sup> are used to describe different bodily sensations, such as hot, cold, numb, tight, raw, chilled, electric, expanding, energized, shaking, trembling, soft, strong, tingling etc. This

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<sup>25</sup> Peter Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice*, 141.

<sup>26</sup> Peter Levine, *Somatic Experiencing Beginning Manual* (Boulder, Somatic Experiencing Trauma Institute), 28.

is often the part that is overlooked and neglected in our daily conversations and spiritual direction.

**Image** refers to both external stimuli (which include the five senses of sight, taste, smell, hearing and tactile) and internal images (such as thoughts, dreams, etc.). For example, the image of a full moon may evoke pleasant memories with the taste of moon cakes and the sounds of a friend’s laughter, or it may bring up feelings of loneliness, missing loved ones and experience heartache or headache. The image affects how we feel, which memory surfaces, how we sense in the body and what meaning we attach to that particular image.

**Behavior** is the only channel that the observer is able to observe directly. One can sometimes “infer the speaker’s inner states from reading his/her body language, the unspoken language of his/her actions/inactions or tension patterns.”<sup>27</sup> These elements refer to any observable behavior:

- Voluntary gestures – such as hands and arms movements when communicating
- Emotional or facial expressions – generally are considered to be largely involuntary, like changes in the muscle tension of the face, jaw tightening, smiling, sobbing, laughing, twitching of the lips, etc.
- Posture – the platforms from which intrinsic movement is initiated; typically refers to the spine—rigid, collapsed, braced, twisted; retraction, expansion, openness, preparatory movement of fight/flight, etc.
- Autonomic signals – includes the cardiovascular and respiratory systems, like breathing rates, heart rate by observing the carotid pulse in the neck, pupil size, skin tone, etc.
- Visceral behavior – digestive shifts can be “observed” via changing sounds in the gut.

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<sup>27</sup> Peter Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice*, 143.

- Archetypal behavior that includes subtle involuntary hands and arms gestures or postural shifts that are similar to hand/finger/arm movements in sacred dances, known as *mudras* that convey universal meanings across the spectrum of the human experience. “These archetypal movements arise at unique moments when the instinctual is seamlessly wedded with one’s conscious awareness—when the primitive brain stem and the highest neocortical functions integrate.”<sup>28</sup>

**Affect** refers to the categorical emotions of fear, anger, sadness, joy and disgust, as well as contours of feelings. Contours are the nuanced, sensation-based (felt sense) feelings of attraction and avoidance, of “goodness” and “badness,” that guide us through the day.

**Meaning** refers to “the labels we attach to the totality of experience—the combined elements of sensation, image, behavior and affect.”<sup>29</sup> These include trauma-based fixed beliefs, distorted values, bias, prejudice, such as “I can trust no one,” “I am bad,” “all step-mothers are cruel,” etc.

Our beliefs and values are influenced by our families, societies, cultures, technologies, religions and personal experiences; some of them may not be relevant anymore; some need to be updated or upgraded. By examining the first four elements of Sensation, Image, Behavior and Affect thoroughly, it is probable for fresh new meaning to emerge with a heightened awareness and consciousness.

### ***Tracking***

When we read about St Ignatius’s experience during his first discernment of spirits at Manresa, he did so by repeatedly tracking the

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<sup>28</sup> Peter Levine, *Trauma and Memory* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2015), 47.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Levine, *In an Unspoken Voice*, 151.

movements of the two different spirits—how different thoughts created different feelings, sensations and meanings inside his whole body.<sup>30</sup>

In spiritual direction, we track the sensations of our directee by observing how their body and nervous systems respond to whatever is being spoken, felt or remembered. By listening to how they tell their stories, we observe their SIBAM. We track for changes and shifts; we observe their gestures, postures, tone of voice and facial expressions. Like a detective, we follow the trail all the way back to the source—is it from the good or bad spirit? Note that when we check the sensations, we need to give as much time as is needed, as it takes much time for the body to sense; and sometimes we need to provide or suggest to the directee a vocabulary of sensations.

In general, we ask open-ended questions to track SIBAM:

- As you are talking about this person/event/memory/prayer experience, what do you feel? (May need to help the directee to name the feelings.)
- As you feel sad/angry/frustrated/excited, where is this feeling in your body? (May need to guide them to check: in your chest/belly/hands/jaw/face...?)
- What is the sensation like in your chest? (May need to provide suggestions like heavy, light, cold, warm, heart beat faster, sweating, tingling...?)
- When you feel sad/angry/frustrated/excited, what else do you notice?

In the process, the spiritual director does self-tracking in order to be aware of any provocation from the directee’s story. It is important to

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<sup>30</sup> Joseph A. Munitiz & Philip Endean. *Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings* (London: Penguin Group, 1996), 15.

develop self-awareness as the bad spirits are active all the time in both the spiritual director and the directee.

### **III. Session Sharing**

Don't try to interpret, analyse, or explain what is happening: just experience and note it, observe them and let them go. "Take it as it comes" is the best way to learn the language of felt sense. Information will come in the form of words, pictures, insights, and emotions, which invariably will be accompanied by another layer of sensations.<sup>31</sup>

I would like to share two spiritual direction sessions to show how I use the SIBAM to deepen the directees' religious experience and to discern the movements of the spirits. It may sound "odd or even weird" as this is not the usual way we converse in daily life. Both directees had participated in previous Ignatian workshops and shorter retreats. The sessions were part of the eight-day retreat.

#### **1. Directee A:**

A had worked for a financial company for over 15 years. Due to the financial crisis, the company had to restructure and downsize, A had to take up more job duties and worked long hours everyday. He had lost his enthusiasm and love for God. He found both working and family lives stressful and demanding. He had no particular desire for the retreat but wanted to be free and longed for simplicity in life.

On the first day of the retreat, I invited him to rest and enjoy the environment of the retreat house. I invited him to read the first day of Creation

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<sup>31</sup> Peter Levine, *Waking the Tiger* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1997), 73.

(Genesis 1:1-5). I suggested that he could do anything, such as drawing, swimming and sleeping to rest and relax himself.

On the second day, he told me that he was very happy when I suggested that he could draw.

**A: Directee A**

**V: Veronica**

A: When I read the second day of Creation, I noticed how God did things step by step. God was not in a hurry. I went up to the rooftop to look at the sky, the ocean, the land. It's so beautiful. I haven't felt so relaxed for a long time. I started to appreciate the beauty of nature. I took out the crayons to draw the trees, flowers, mountains...I felt a deep joy in my heart. (A gentle smile on his face; his eye sparkle.) When I was a kid, I loved drawing and I drew well. But my father was very strict, he forbade me to draw when I started secondary school. He said drawing was not productive and a waste of time. He expected me to get good grades at school, and then find a good job. (A sad look on his face, face falls, and a flat tone of voice.) I remembered my father's face and then heard a voice in my mind, "See, you are so lazy and just want to play, you haven't changed since you were a boy. You are on a retreat, you should read the Bible and pray!" So, I stopped drawing...blaming myself for not taking the retreat seriously! (His body immediately collapses on the chair.)

V: What else do you notice?

A: I feel sad and guilty because I am wasting time here. (His head lowered, he tears up, his shoulders brace and his eyes look down on the floor.)

V: Let's pause and go back a little. When you said that you realized God is not in a hurry, doing things step by step, what was your experience?

A: (Starts to sit up a little bit, wiping the tears) I felt relaxed, a sense of relief and a little surprised. I pushed myself and worked very hard all my life, but on the contrary, God was not in a hurry!

V: Where in your body did you feel this relief?

A: My chest. I can breathe more easily. I can even smell the roses, sensing the breeze blowing over my body. I feel like melting in the arms of God. I am very touched. My image of God was like my father, strict and

demanding, but this time I experience God's tenderness and gentleness. Quite a surprise. (His tone lifts, his eyes open wider and his hands rest on the armrest.)

V: When you started to draw the trees, flowers... what happened?

A: Oh, it was a wonderful feeling to hold the crayons in my hand. It was such a joy. I felt the little boy inside me becoming alive again. (Moving his fingers and wrist like he is drawing.)

V: What is it like to feel alive again in your body?

A: There was a warmth throughout my body, my heart beats faster, my whole body feels much lighter. I feel energized (He lifts his head up, a smile on his face, his eyes sparkle, his right hand on his chest.) and feel there is hope in life. I am 47 years old, hmmm... mid-life crisis, it's about time to think about what's important in life.

V: You feel hopeful and want to explore what's important in life. Then, what happened when you recalled your father's face and heard his voice?

A: In a way, I regressed to a little boy. The voice reminded me that my father always scolded me for being "lazy and unproductive"... I had to obey my father... otherwise he would beat me and there'd be no dinner. I had no choice.

V: What did you feel when you heard the voice scolding you?

A: It was loud and mean, just like my father's voice. It was scary. My heart began to pound and beat very fast. My limbs felt numb and weak, felt like my father was going to beat me and I could not escape. I told myself, "I have made a mistake again! I have made father angry again!" So, I felt guilty and sad. (Body slightly collapses, his head down, breathing heavily.)

V: These are two very different experiences. Let's review them. What is the impact of each experience on you? How are they different?

A: Yes, they were very different, but they happened so fast. The first one made me feel relaxed and hopeful. It gave me a new understanding and experience of God. I did not expect this. It's a pleasant surprise. The other was heavy and depressing. It pulled me back to the past and kind of reminded me that I had no choice, I was still under my father's power. I was still trapped.

The good spirit touched A with “tenderness and gentleness” but the bad spirit did the contrary “to bite, sadden and put obstacles, disquieting with false reasons, that one may not go on.” [SE 315]<sup>32</sup>

In the following table, I use SIBAM to illustrate how the movements of the good and bad spirits manifested themselves and the corresponding Rules for the Discernment of Spirits that are observed in the last row of the table.

	<b>Good Spirit</b>	<b>Bad Spirit</b>
Sensation	Open chest Deeper breathing Warmth in the body Energized	Heart pounding Limbs numbed and powerless
Image	Nature: flowers, mountains, breeze  God is not in a hurry	Strict, punitive father scolding him: “lazy and unproductive”
Behavior	Draw pictures Smile on his face	Head down Body collapses
Affect	Relaxed, hopeful, joy, enjoying himself	Guilty, scared, sad, trapped
Meaning	I have grown up I can make my own choices  New image of God: gentle and tender	I made mistake again I was trapped like the little boy  I had no choice
Guidelines for Discerning Spirits	First Week [313-327] <sup>33</sup>	

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<sup>32</sup> Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 212.

<sup>33</sup> Louis J. Puhl, S.J., *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1950), 141-146.

## 2. Directee B

B was in her early 60s. She served as an evangelist for over 25 years. The church hired a new pastor last year and she had difficulties working with him. She felt rejected and despised. One of her brothers had committed suicide one year ago and her mother died of a heart attack two months ago.

On the third day, I suggested that she pray on the scriptural passage “*Jesus Raises the Widow’s Son at Nain.*” (Luke 7:11-17)

**B: Directee B**

**V: Veronica**

B: I could not pray on the scripture you gave me yesterday. I was too upset.

V: Tell me what happened.

B: I was angry. Jesus would show up in the scene to comfort the widow and resurrect the boy. But in my prayer, I only saw two hands. I want to see Jesus in my prayer, but he never answers my prayer. I heard so many others say that Jesus would sit beside them or hug them, but it never happened to me. I know I am not welcome. From the day I was born, my parents did not like me because I am a girl. Even Jesus does not want to come close to me.

V: I see that you are very angry and upset.

B: Yes, I am angry, upset and sad. (Tears rolling down her cheeks, her jaws clenched, her right hand in a fist.)

V: I am curious when you said that you always saw two hands in your prayer. Can you recall this experience?

B: Yes, they are right in front of me. (She shows me the position of the hands, then bursts into tears.) Jesus does not like me. I disappointed him.

V: How about you look at the hands for a little longer? (Glad that she agrees.)

B: (Staring at the spot she showed me just now)...Oh, I saw the hands moving towards me (A sense of wonder on her face, her tears stop, her eyes open)...I saw the holes on the palms...Oh! They are the hands of the resurrected Jesus...They are touching my broken heart... (She lowers her head slowly and becomes more attentive and still)...the

hands tenderly wiping the blood, soothing and comforting my wounds...then the hand put a band-aid on the wounds...(Suddenly she looks up in the air)...I hear a song in my mind, it's one of my favourite hymns. The lyrics are about following God till the end of my life because he is my only saviour...(Then she starts to sing it...head up, body straight, stronger breathing.)

V: Oh, you heard a song in your mind...but let's go back to your heart...let's see what happens next when the hand put a band-aid on the wounds? (Glad that she is willing to stop singing and brings her attention back to the heart.)

B: (She lowers her head again and put her hands on her chest)... I feel the hands are embracing my broken heart...My heart can finally settle...there is an anchor for my heart to land...I feel being comforted, Jesus understands my pain.

V: Jesus comes in person to embrace your heart, what is it like?

B: Amazing. I have never thought Jesus would do this to me...I thought when I saw the band-aid, that's it...now I feel safe and not alone...now I know why God only lets me see the hands...God wants to come and heal my wounds in person...wow, it's beyond my imagination.

V: (I let her settle and savor the experience. We sit silently for a while.)

V: Let's review what happened just now. What happened when you heard the hymn in your mind?

B: I left Jesus' healing work on me...As I started to sing, I felt there was heat in my body, feeling so energized and good. Then I started to think that the lyrics are true...The theology is right that God alone is my Savior...There was a voice telling me, "Now Jesus has healed you, you should go and serve God more..."...then I started to think about the project I am working on at church...I focus on myself more. I left Jesus.

V: Then what happened when I invited you to come back to the healing work?

B: The experience was much deeper. I could feel the presence of Jesus. I could sense God's tender love and total acceptance of my unworthiness...I was overwhelmed with joy and surprise...I have never

thought that Jesus would come so close to me. I felt the anchor in my heart. Jesus knows what I need now is healing, not just do do do...

V: What is it like when your heart finds the anchor? What changes do you notice in your chest?

B: I feel more relaxed, my chest becomes lighter and more spacious inside. I can breathe better and deeper. My whole body is calming down. I am safe now. Oh! My God! God really loves me. I am the beloved daughter. (Tears rolling down her cheeks, she sits back in silence.)

	Good Spirit	Bad Spirit
Sensation	Warmth Heart settled and calm Chest relaxed, lighter and more spacious inside Breathe better and deeper	Heartbeat faster Heat in the body Feel energized Stronger breathing
Image	The two hands  Jesus' resurrected hands with the holes  Jesus puts a band-aid on her broken heart Jesus' hands embracing her broken heart Anchor in her heart	Other people could see Jesus, not me  Hear the hymn  Hear "Now Jesus has healed you, you should go and serve God more."  Her projects at church
Behavior	Eyes open Body becomes still and attentive Sit back	Holding right fist Tight jaw Sing the hymn

Affect	<p>Amazed</p> <p>Being touched, comforted, soothed and understood</p> <p>Feel safe and not alone</p> <p>Joy and surprise</p>	<p>Angry, upset and sad</p> <p>Feel energized and good</p>
Meaning	<p>Jesus understands my pain</p> <p>Jesus knows what I need is healing now</p> <p>God really loves me as I am, not because of how much I do</p> <p>I am the beloved daughter</p>	<p>I am not welcome</p> <p>I disappointed Jesus</p> <p>Jesus does not like me</p> <p>Need to do all the time</p>
Rules for the Discernment of Spirits	<p>Second Week [328-336]<sup>34</sup></p>	

The bad spirit tried to tempt Directee B with her favourite hymn with good meaning to take her away from the intimate moment with Jesus. As Guillen suggests, “a full examination that covers all stages of the experience will finish up revealing the ‘serpent’s tail’ of the Tempter, the evil end to which he leads.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Louis J. Puhl, S.J., *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1950), 147-150.

<sup>35</sup> Antonio Guillen, ‘Deceptions in Discernment,’ *The Way* 49, no. 3 (2010), 81-93.

## **Conclusion:**

Five centuries have passed since the time of St. Ignatius, with advances in sciences, technologies, neurosciences and other disciplines of studies on human and our universe; there are more tools available to widen and deepen our self-understanding and the knowledge of God. This self-knowledge and knowledge of the spirits are essential to guide us to discern if our decision leads us to follow God or away from God.

There are many voices in our daily lives, not just when we pray. The ability to recognise God's voice like the sheep recognising the shepherd, and how the bad spirit stirs us up are vital in developing personal relationship with God and to strengthen us to follow in the footsteps of Christ. Somatic Experiencing, a body-based trauma healing model, provides an appropriate tool to examine the movement of the spirits and to "detect across the whole spectrum of our activity and consciousness the movements through which the Holy Spirit leads and enlightens us, and those through which other influences, if given their head, work against that guiding and light."<sup>36</sup> The more we learn to pay attention to the SIBAM, the more skilful we can be to discern the spirits and to follow Christ closer and better.

Like St. Ignatius, we review, re-visit and re-examine the details of our experiences, engaging in "every way of preparing and making ourselves ready to get rid of all disordered affections so that, once rid of them, one might seek and find the divine will in regard to the disposition of one's life for the salvation of the soul."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Michael Ivens, *Understanding the Spiritual Exercises*, 207.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

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**【摘要】** 聖依納爵寫神操的目的是為拯救靈魂。他從自己皈依的經驗當中，留意到有兩種不同的神類在他的幻想中出現：一種是天主的靈感，另一種由魔鬼以來；並且寫下了「辨別神類的規則」。辨別神類不是一個簡單的過程。

聖依納爵誕生在 15 世紀，距今五百多年，隨着科技上不斷突破，和不同專家在不同領域的專業知識增長，我們對於人類的生理、心理、思想、行為都有更深的了解，能透過儀器觀察身體內部結構和狀態，例如能量、神經元、血液運行、腦細胞活動等等。

本文透過介紹一些重要的神經系統科學發展里程碑，和由彼德列汶博士建立的「體感創傷療法」，指出可以利用「體感創傷療法」的技巧幫助神操過程中辨別神類，並分享兩個靈修指導的個案作為例子。

**關鍵詞：**神操，辨別神類，體感創傷療法，神經系統科學