

READING FOR RETREATS

by Dennison Berwick

In 1995, in one of my breaks from writing and travelling, I founded and built a retreat centre on a 90-acre farm in southern Ontario, Canada. Still Life Retreat was non-denominational, though the teachings of the Buddha inform my own way of life and practice.

The intention of Still Life Retreat was support people in whatever type of retreat they needed to make. I used to joke that Still Life served mostly the "wilted and the wired" - those individuals who were exhausted and needed rest and to refresh themselves, or who were moving and talking too much and needed to slow down.

Part of the outreach (as well as marketing) of Still Life Retreat was to publish the Canadian Retreat Guide, a guide to more than 140 places offering retreats or accommodation for inner personal reflection. This reading guide was part of the guide. The book is now out of print, but the information is still available on the net.

I returned to full-time writing and travelling in 2000. The retreat centre is now operated as Still Life Christian Retreat.

Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version. Publ. Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1952. The Christian Bible (in its many, many translations and versions) has much of interest, entertainment and value for people of all spiritual traditions or practices. Especially for people who may have rejected Christianity as teenagers or adults, rereading the Bible with an open mind can be a liberating and rejuvenating experience. Sound advice for all spiritual reading and teaching is to "take what you need and leave the rest".

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dennisonberwick@gmail.com

www.dennisonberwick.info

à Kempis, Thomas. The Imitation of Christ. Trans. Richard Whitford. Publ. Pocket Library, 1959. Written in Latin over 500 years ago, this is one of the great inspirational guides of Christianity. Thomas à Kempis advises the reader to shun pride, greed and inordinate delights of the flesh because these sins prevent a person from attaining a true serenity of soul and a contentment of mind. He advocates the good life over a life which is merely long.

Babbitt, Irving, trans. The Dhammapada. Translated from the Pali with an essay on Buddhism & the West. New Directions Paperback, 1965. ISBN 0-8112-0004-3. One of the clearest translations of this classic of Buddhist literature. A treasury of 423 verses attributed to Shakyamuni Buddha himself that contains the essence of the ethics of Buddhist philosophy. Babbitt's essay on "Buddha and the Occident" is a little dated now (it was written in the 1930s).

Berry, Thomas. The Dream of the Earth. Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, 1990. ISBN Berry uses particle physics to show the compatibility of the new science with the concept of the universe as a "single gorgeous celebratory event". He presents a mode of being where humans celebrate and open outwards towards a vision of interconnected, interdependent interaction with all life forms, throughout the Earth and Universe. He outlines courses of study designed to present "the dynamics of the earth as a self-emerging, self-sustaining, self-educating, self-governing and self-fulfilling community of all living and non-living beings of the planet".

Bokser, Ben Zion. The Jewish Mystical Tradition. Pilgrim Press, 1981. ISBN 1-56821-014-0. A representative selection of writings of the Jewish mystics from the earliest times to today, from the Bible, the Sefer Hasidim (Book of the Pious) to Rabbi Kook, with a general introduction by Ben Zion Bokser on the nature of mysticism and the distinctiveness of its Jewish component.

Coelho, Paulo. The Alchemist, A Fable About Following Your Dream. Harper, San Francisco, 1993. ISBN 0-06-250266-2. A delightful book-length fable about an Andalusian shepherd boy's search for (spiritual) treasure. From his home in Spain, Santiago journeys into the Egyptian desert where a fateful encounter with the alchemist awaits him. The popularity of this book when first published in Brazil has been repeated worldwide. An entertaining and thought-provoking story for both children and adults.

Cooper, David A. Silence, Simplicity and Solitude, A Guide for Spiritual Retreat. Bell Tower, Harmony Books, 1992. ISBN 0-517-88186-1. An excellent introduction and guide to the practice of spiritual retreats. The tradition of retreats is explored through Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism; with practical, common-sense advice on the components, such as silence, solitude, willpower, teachers, security, for setting up a retreat, and an introduction to spiritual practices used in retreats, including prayer, breathing, mindfulness, vision quests, hatha yoga and mantras.

Cooper, David A. The Heart of Stillness, The Elements of Spiritual Practice. Bell Tower, Harmony Books, 1992. ISBN 0-517-88187-X. This companion volume to "Silence, Simplicity and Solitude" is a road guide to the barriers, detours and pitfalls to be encountered on the path of the spiritual journey. Drawing on the traditions of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism, the author investigates four essential elements - purification, concentration, effort and mastery - and the dangers and challenges of both unpleasant and pleasant states of mind of the spiritual seeker.

Dass, Ram. The Only Dance There Is. Anchor books, Doubleday, 1974. ISBN 0-385-08413-7. Edited transcripts of his talks to health science professionals in the 1970s. Ram Dass gives a fascinating road tour of his own spiritual journey (sadhana) from doctor of psychology at Stanford to training with his guru in India. He describes the highlights and pitfalls of the journey, explains the "ashram cycle" in which the seeker retreats from the world to a hermitage and later returns to the city and society to serve people.

Deng, Ming-Dao. 365 Tao, Daily Meditations. Harper Collins, 1992. ISBN 0-06-250223-9. These readings bring the ancient Chinese wisdom of the Tao Te Ching into everyday life and encourage readers to think for themselves and to explore the truth of their own experience of life. "Tao fundamentally assumes that an inner cultivation of character can lead to an outer resonance," writes Deng Ming-Dao.

Elgin, Duane. Voluntary Simplicity, Toward A Way of Life that is Outwardly Simple, Inwardly Rich. William Morrow & Co., 1981. ISBN 0-688-00322-2. Many more people in the West are seeking a simpler way of life since this book was first published in 1981 but remains an invaluable inspiration and practical guide for anyone contemplating or already taking steps to simplify their way of life. Simplifying one's life - purification - may be considered among the first challenges of the spiritual journey.

Estes, Clarissa Pinkola. Women Who Run With the Wolves. Ballantine Books, 1992. ISBN 0-345-40987-6. A book for soul-starved women - for those who know and those as yet unaware of their starvation. The author uses myth and fairy tales to describe how we become soul-starved and how to reconnect with our instinctual nature. It is possible to read each story separately, pondering its implication, taking your time through the book.

Frankl, Viktor E. Man's Search for Meaning. Washington Square Press, Simon & Schuster, 1985. ISBN 0-671-66736-X. The story of Frankl's years in a Nazi death camp where he developed his revolutionary theory that the primary motivational force is not power, pleasure or survival but a person's search for meaning. As one reader has described, "I never thought a book describing experiences in a concentration camp could be uplifting!"

Gibran, Kahlil. The Prophet. Alfred A. Knopf, 1966. A book of insights and teachings; first published in 1923, it has become one of the great spiritual classics of the 20th century. The book is laid out in 28 sections with poetic teachings on everyday living, including, marriage, work, houses, joy and sorrow, crime and punishment, talking, beauty religion and death. Deep contemplations useful for beginners and experienced spiritual travellers.

Hoff, Benjamin. The Tao of Pooh. Penguin Books, 1982. ISBN 0-14-006747-7. In which a wellknown bear, with friends Piglet, Rabbit and Eeyore, explains the principles of Taoism by "wandering around asking silly questions, making up songs, and going through all kinds of adventures, without ever accumulating any amount of intellectual knowledge or losing his simpleminded sort of happiness". Delightful.

Ignatius, Saint. The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius, A translation and commentary. Trans. by Anthony Mottola. Loyola University Press, Chicago, 1992. Probably the most famous guidebook for an intensive retreat, and as popular today as when written in the 16th century by the founder of the Jesuits. The Exercises includes schedules and guidance for four weeks of retreat practice that should not be attempted without proper guidance.

Jalál al-Dín Rûmí, Maulana. Rumi - Daylight, A Daybook of Spiritual Guidance. Threshold Books, 1990. ISBN 0-939660-35-0. Poetic extracts from Books I & II of the colossal spiritual masterpiece the "Mathnawi" (25,632 couplets) written by the 13th century Islamic mystic, religious professor and poet, born in Afghanistan. He admonishes all: "Know that the outward form passes away, but the world of reality remains forever. How long will you play at loving the shape of the jug? Leave the jug; go, seek the water!"

Kapleau, Roshi Philip. The Three Pillars of Zen, Teaching, Practice, and Enlightenment. Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1980. ISBN 0-385-26093-8. One of the primary explanations of Zen practice and teachings in Western literature, that has helped many thousands of Western practitioners cultivate and deepen their practice. Kapleau quotes from many of the great Soto and Rinzai Zen teachers of the last 600 years and explains the famous and intimate teaching method of the "interview" between Zen master and student.

Lao Tzu. Tao Te Ching. Arkana, Penguin Books, 1985. ISBN 0-14-019060-0. Translated more often than any other book except the Bible, the Tao Te Ching (meaning "book of morals") is a very concise book of philosophical speculation and mystical reflections concerning the life-flow, the "it" of life. This edition of the 1910 Richard Wilhelm translation has many helpful notes.

Larkin, Geri. Stumbling Towards Enlightenment. Celestial Arts, Berkeley, ISBN 0-89087-849-8 \$18.50. Funny, street-smart look at getting started and getting along the spiritual path. Covers the author's three-year Zen training under Korean master Ven. Samu Sunim. Lots of wrestling with sexual desire and bad hair days. She encourages, explains and energizes.

Levine, Stephen. A Gradual Awakening, A Practical Approach to Meditation. Anchor, Doubleday, 1978. ISBN 0-09-141231-5. A straightforward guide to the practice of meditation that is as useful for a regular practitioner as for the beginner; with original discussion and guidelines that brings meditation practice into daily life, and assists in the challenge of working in the world while practising purity of heart.

Mascaro, Juan, trans. Bhagavad Gita. Viking Penguin, 1962. The most famous part of the Indian epic, the Mahavharata. This is the dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurkshetra in which he reveals the profound, sublime and soul-stirring spiritual truths of Hinduism. A poetic explanation of the fundamentals, including Yoga, Vedanta, Bhakti and Karma.

Millman, Dan. Way of the Peaceful Warrior. H.J. Kramer, Inc., 1984. ISBN 0-915811-00-6. A world champion gymnast's spiritual journey to peace by learning to see the wisdom, compassion and humour in life through the eyes of an unlikely sage (an elderly but magic garage attendant). A delightful story of struggle, inner resistance and ultimate enlightenment which gives the reader pause in regard to his/her own journey.

Myss, Caroline. Anatomy of the Spirit. Random House, New York., ISBN 0-609-80014-0 \$19.50. Through her characteristic no-nonsense style, use of personal experience and story-telling, the concept of "woundology" is introduced and the reader is invited to reconnect with others at a deeper level. She integrates the Eastern idea of chakras with the Christian sacraments and the Judaic Tree of Life in a clear and concise manner. Anyone interested in energy healing will be fascinated by her thought-provoking originality.

Packer, Toni. The Work of the Moment. Shambhala, Boston, 1990. ISBN 0-87773-536-0. An eclectic gathering of talks, essays, interviews and letters in which Packer prescribes a simple and original approach to spiritual growth. A former Zen teacher, Buddhist-orientated teaching pervades her ideas without overwhelming. Packer writes that the mystery of life, the essence of all life, is not separate from the silent openness of simple listening.

Pearson, Carol S. *Awakening The Heroes Within, 12 Archetypes To Help Us Find Ourselves & Transform Our World*. HarperCollins Publishers, 1991. ISBN 0-06-250678-1. This book describes how, on our journey to find the treasure of our true selves, we spiral through 12 archetypes again and again at increasingly wiser levels. Its premise is that in recreating our daily lives, we need to feel rooted in both history and eternity, and that the myth of the hero allows us to make that link. It is a practical reference which includes a questionnaire that makes you aware of how prominent each archetype is in your own life. Peck, M.

Scott, *Denial of the Soul*. Harmony Books, 1987. ISBN 0-517-70865-5 He explores the core issues people face about euthanasia. How does taking a life differ from allowing death? This book causes the reader to think, rethink and think again. What can we learn for ourselves from the process of dying a natural death? Peck suggests we should never judge the quality of another person's life because, for example, a deteriorating intellect may not represent a deteriorating spiritual life. This is a "misidentification of the intellect with the soul". A common pitfall for all on the spiritual path.

Peck, M. Scott, *The Road Less Travelled*. Simon & Schuster, New York. ISBN 0-68484728-0 \$19.50. A long-time bestseller in which the author presents "The Road" as a path which if the beginning of a difficult and unending journey toward spiritual growth. With personable humour, he enables the reader to feel the "road" will be exciting and an adventure. Easy reading, this book provides many "aha" experiences.

Rinpoche, Sogyal. *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1993. ISBN 0-06-250834-2. The book has been described as a lucid and inspiring introduction to the practice of meditation, to the nature of mind, to karma and rebirth, to compassionate love and care for the dying, and to the trails and rewards of the spiritual path. Although not easy going for the uninitiated, it is a magnificent source of sacred inspiration from the heart of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

Sales, Francis de. *Introduction to the Devout Life*. Scholar Press, 1976. Written by the founder of the Salesian order in the 16th century, the book outlines five steps for spiritual growth, from desire for holiness to methods for spiritual renewal. Gentle methods with wide appeal.

Sardello, Robert. Facing the World With Soul. Lindisfarne Press, 1992. ISBN 0-940262-46-0. Promoting a sense of the world as filled with the presence of

Sophia, the Soul of the World. Sardello suggests we can approach daily life in a new way if we learn to practice the arts of concentration, meditation, imagination and contemplation. Look for subtle thought, dry wit, spiritual depth and astounding insights in this thought-provoking book.

Schumacher, E. F. A Guide for the Perplexed. Harper & Row, 1977. By the author of "Small is Beautiful", here he uses his incisive philosophical analysis to identify the main ideas with which we think about life and how some of our cherished ideas can be obstacles to health and happiness in our society. He proposes 4 great truths as road signs - his guides for the perplexed.

Sharp, Joseph. Living Our Dying, A Way To the Sacred in Everyday Life. Hyperion, 1996. ISBN 0-7868-6230-0. Sometimes we may wonder, "Why consciously choose to embrace and feel the pain of our life's impermanence, of our dying?" Sharp suggests that if we close ourselves off from our own dying, our own mortality, there's a separation, an incompleteness to our experience of daily life. He integrates powerful Christian, Buddhist, contemporary cultural & psychological insights, poems, prayers and moving quotations to create a compassionate book that's inspiring not depressing.

Spidlik, Thomas. Drinks from the Forbidden Fountain, A Patristic Breviary. Ancient Wisdom for Today's World. Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, 1993. ISBN 0-97907-348-9. Daily readings from the best writings of early Christian fathers (and mothers?) in the 4th to 6th centuries AD, including Ambrose, John Chrysostom, Maximus the Confessor and Isaac of Ninevah. These Patrist writings examine the essentials of the Christian faith as they affect daily life, worship and prayer. Recommended not only for Christians but for everyone on the path of the spirit.

Suzuki, Shunryu. Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind, Informal Talks on Zen meditation and practice. Weatherhill, 1994. ISBN 0-8348-0079-9. Just asking what you are is Beginner's Mind: the mind that is open, includes doubt and possibility, and the ability to see things always as fresh and new. Adapted from talks by the Japanese Zen master. Includes instructions on posture, breathing, emptiness and enlightenment.

Teresa of Avila. *The Interior Castle*. Trans, by K. Kavanaugh & O. Rodriguez. Paulist Press, 1979. One of the classics of Western Christian spirituality, leading the individual from the beginnings of spiritual growth to the heights of mysticism, through the "mansions" of self-knowledge to peaceful union with God.

Thoreau, Henry David. *Walking*. Penguin Books, 1995. ISBN 0-14-60.0108-7. An entertaining and thoughtful essay on the art and pleasures of walking. Amongst other gems, Thoreau explains the beautiful derivation of "sauntering" as coming from the nickname for people who in the Middle Ages, asked for alms under the pretense of being on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, "à la Sainte Terre". Thoreau sings the joys of walking for its own sake which, he explains, have nothing to do with walking as a means of taking exercise.

Vardey, Lucinda. *God In All Worlds, An Anthology of Contemporary Spiritual Writing*. Alfred Knopf, 1995. ISBN 0-394-28001-6. An 877-page handbook presenting a serendipitous collection of spiritual writings for and about the modern world. Vardey draws from all spiritual traditions, and many writers not so easily categorized, to present contemporary understanding and teachings on the spiritual quest, revelation, trials, surrender, death and awe. An invaluable anthology for all seekers.

Walsch, Neale David. *Conversations With God - an uncommon dialogue*. Book 1. G. P. Putnam, 1996. ISBN 0-399-14278-9. The story of how one man asked God his most puzzling questions about existence - about love and faith, life and death, good and evil, and received clear, understandable answers. If you are interested in imagining a bigger picture of God than the one presented by traditional Christianity, this book is for you.

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