

Reading Is a Spiritual Practice

from

A Religion of One's Own

by Thomas Moore

I recommend reading the classic spiritual texts from around the world, especially those that particularly appeal to you. ***Read them slowly and carefully—meditatively.*** In many formal religions ***reading is a spiritual practice.***

Portions of the New Testament were read aloud as early as the first century AD. In ***Christianity***, too, we find ***lectio divina, reading as a kind of meditation.*** In ***Islam*** reading the Qur'an is a devout spiritual practice, surrounded by a precise spiritual etiquette. You shouldn't even handle a copy of the Qur'an unless you purify yourself first. I remember, as a ***Catholic altar boy*** of eleven, holding a leather-bound copy of the Missal against my forehead while the priest read from it during a solemn high Mass. In ***Judaism*** the great honor given to the scrolls of the Torah also demonstrates the sacred importance of books and reading. ***Sikhs*** give great honor to the Guru Granth Sahib, a collection of traditional writings teaching the Sikh way of life.

You can practice your own lectio divina, reading for spiritual insight rather than information or entertainment. Select a short text from a classic source and slowly read one phrase after another. Read it more than once, perhaps aloud, so that you can let the word enter you sensually. ***Let the meaning and the beauty of the language impress itself on you.*** You may have to try different translations until you find one that works for you. Or, as I do, you may use several translations at once, trying one after another. Let the nuances of the texts give you a layered notion of what is being said.

You could create a special shelf of books, sources for your spiritual reading, books that you hold sacred. Mine includes the ***Bible***, the ***Qur'an***, a special translation of the ***Psalms***, Jane Hirshfield's inspiring collection ***Women in Praise of the Sacred***, ***Jung's autobiography***, and ***Homer's Odyssey***. You can do the same on your ***electronic reader***, giving these books a special place. You can ***read them regularly and reverently.***

The ***Christian lectio divina practice*** involves ***four acts: read, meditate, pray, and contemplate.*** You read thoughtfully, then you turn over the thoughts in your mind. Next, you engage in dialogue with the divine, and then you open yourself to the world around you. Really open yourself.

My lectio divina would be slightly different: ***read slowly, reflect on the words, let them take you to a deep place, take a message or lesson from that place. Go into the world with your imagination educated and primed by the images of your meditative reading. If prayer seems appropriate, let it take place after the four steps.***