

Chapter Twenty-five

READING

At this high level, we must read as if listening to music, or wind, or a small mountain waterfall. Breathe the fragrance of the words. Let them float through your eyes and ears and mind. Let them touch your heart.

And do it every day.

LU

Oblivion and bliss look very much alike, but they are polar opposites. Unconsciousness and super-consciousness are both non-rational, but they, too, are polar opposites.

LU



MR

Read As If Listening To Music

You are so right about the difficulties of bringing high-level wisdom-words into one's life and having them remain. If this kind of reading were only an intellectual exercise, then you could reduce a master's words to knowledge, like physics or math, and simply memorize them and repeat them like a parrot. In fact, that is what many people do: they are called scholars! From Buddha to the present, enlightened masters have universally insisted that mere intellectual grasping and holding of words is not enough.

At this high level, we must read as if listening to music, or wind, or a small mountain waterfall. Breathe the fragrance of the words. Let them float through your eyes and ears and mind. Let them touch your heart. And do it every day. This kind of reading is rather like eating food. You need renewed input each day. Spiritually energized reading nourishes body, mind, spirit, and some of it remains with you, perhaps only a small part. Even if a recollection of words and phrases disappears altogether, the substance of those words remains. Bit by bit, you change, you grow.

Over a period of time, not necessarily years or a whole lifetime, but daily, one day at a time, your readings and listenings and yoga exercises and meditations slowly dissolve conditioning, cleanse the portals of the eyes, awaken the heartsong — and almost as if suddenly, you wake up one day a different person. And you are! Even as you already are now, today, even as you read this e-mail.

You keep the boat empty, as Chuang Tzu characterized it, by nourishing yourself daily in these ways — and by locating yourself in the living eternal moment (meditation is being *present in the present*). Awareness in the now clears the boards instantly, doesn't it? Empty mind. Empty boat. Then you are everywhere.

SL The Art of Receptivity: Ride on the Wings of Angels

I like to hang out with geniuses. Always have. Ever since I can remember, I have been drawn to intelligent, insightful, warm-hearted people. And then, when I discovered certain books in which the deepest, highest, wisest thoughts of brilliant people were embodied, well, hello — I have never looked back.

In life along every step of the way, and in novels, in non-fiction writings, and in the spoken words of the world's masters, I have found great nourishment. Food for the mind, yes, but also heartfelt kinship, invaluable insight into life's complexities, great love, laughter, information, and above all association with people who have one way or another transcended the limitations and oppressive orthodoxies of their immediate personal contexts.

They see INTO their contexts and penetrate to the heart of whatever life-wisdom may exist there. They transmute immediate and merely personal and idiosyncratic domains into the timeless and the universal. These are the great seers of the human race. They evolve out of the herd-mentality in which they were born; they ascend into individuality, uniqueness, authenticity; and, with skill and luck, they rise up into universal consciousness relevant to all peoples of the world.

And so we as contemporary readers, living in California or England, or China, India, or Brazil, can read Sophocles, Buddha, Jesus, Lao Tzu, Shakespeare, Emerson, Thoreau, Krishnamurti, Osho, Wilber and dozens of others and be touched to the core.

Our own receptivity makes all the difference, of course. If we are not receptive, we cannot open our hearts and minds, understand, and absorb. But if we have learned the art of receptivity, we can ride on the wings of angels in books the same way we can ride on the wings of angels through music.

Great authors and musicians, like great painters and sculptors, live forever. They are right here, right now, like delicious food on the table. It's up to us to help ourselves!

MH Explore on Your Own: Trust Your Direct Experience

It may sound obvious, but it's one of life's most profound insights: When it comes to reading and listening (and a multitude of other domains), forget other peoples' opinions. Look into music and literature for yourself, see what you think, what you like, what you don't like — and trust your direct experience.

That observation can apply to just about any endeavor — musicians and their music, painters and their art, writers and their books, whatever.

The courage to explore on your own and to make up your own mind, independently from the public arena, will carry you far. It is probably the only true way to learn anything at all.

To be sure, it's wise to listen to others and take note of what they say, because we do, after all, live within our contemporary context. But after listening to whatever is said, delve into the matter yourself, plumb the depths and heights to your own satisfaction, and make up your own mind.

If I listened to the often well-meaning oafs in the public domain and followed their direction, I would never read somebody like Schopenhauer, Plato, Plotinus, or Nietzsche, and I would never open the pages of a book by Ken Wilber, Osho, Lao Tzu, or Krishnamurti; and I would never read a novel by the brilliant Thomas Mann or Hermann Hesse, or the delightfully raunchy John Burdett.

Seek, read, trust yourself, and you will find all that you need and want.

MR Right Reading Is Direct Experience

Hi, M,

So glad *Siddhartha* is ringing a few bells with you. A good book can do wonders to open inner doors — "*Siddhartha* has had a profound effect on my thoughts," you said. Hey, way to go!

You ask a very important question — "what is the work to do on oneself — is it here already — is it pointless and futile reading as many books as possible looking for answers when all the answers are within?"

There is a notion, prevalent in every age, that reading is an irrelevant "pointless and futile" exercise; that reading is a quest for "knowledge" and knowledge is also irrelevant, even distracting and/or debilitating; that reading is a quest for "answers," and there "are no answers"; and that one should drop reading, drop knowledge, and simply meditate, pursue yoga or other methodologies, and perhaps become a disciple to a qualified guru. We are all of us subjected to these reservations, and, indeed, there are elements of truth in them, especially if one accepts the underlying assumptions — that reading is a quest for knowledge and answers.

I look at it somewhat differently. True, you are already full, complete, whole, and all of the "answers" are already within you. However, you/I/we human beings tend to remain unconscious of this fullness of being. The search is not for "answers" outside of ourselves, but for awakening to that which we already are.

Right reading is not simply research into knowledge domains. Right reading is direct experience, and direct experience does not take place exclusively on the physical, literal level. It also takes place on an emotional level, a mental level, an integrating spiritual level. In this reading domain we are talking about, direct experience is connecting deeply with the mind-spirit of the person who wrote the book. If that person is awakened (as are all of the people I listed), then you are receiving the highest, best and most profound insights that are humanly available.

At this level, right reading is not for knowledge, but for insight, guidelines, suggestions — sparks of light that trigger off corresponding sparks within your own psyche and your own soul. When you read a good book written (or spoken) by an awakened soul, the current goes from the mind-heart of the writer, directly into your own mind-heart. And there, in the center of your being, it does its work. It is just as direct as contact with a living person.

It is not futile, either. As you allow the writers and their works into your mind and heartspace, the thoughts, feelings, insights and information settle in you like seeds. True, you don't get to hear the sound of the writer's physical voice; you don't get to look into his or her eyes; you don't get feedback from him or her. But you do get to receive and incorporate the very best that each writer has to offer — it is that incorporation that opens doors, and each door leads to another — on and on, further and deeper and higher into yourself. Not into knowledge (which is merely acquisition of information), but into psycho-spiritual expansion. You become deeper. You become more aware. You become more attuned with your own levels of consciousness. You start from wherever you are, and you grow into new levels.

Reading books of depth, written by writer-speakers who are awakened, intelligent, articulate, can be one of the most rewarding, enriching, enlivening activities you can possibly participate in. You yourself are already an important element. Without you, the book just lies there on the shelf. But if you open the book, and bring yourself to the book with intensity, sincerity, concentration and receptivity, the contents of that book can become a resonant part of your life. But you have to care, and care deeply.

Yes, all the "answers" exist within you already, but you only vaguely sense them, vaguely apprehend their realities, implications, complexities, levels of depth. Right reading is like connecting directly with the geniuses of all times and places — they can light fires in your soul. They can help you wake up to who you already are. They cannot do it for you. You have to do the actual awakening yourself. But they

can point, suggest, plant seeds, assist you through those scary transitional zones. Yes, life is perfect — but how many of us know how to see this, realize it and live it? We all have the capacity to realize it — and the reality is already with us — but how do we wake up to it?

We are not just one kind or level of consciousness, although it may seem like it. Consciousness develops. It grows from level to level. It evolves from prepersonal stages into personal stages on up into higher, more encompassing stages of transpersonal awareness. We do not have to stay where we are, thinking that this is all there is. We can move on, grow, develop, ascend.

Meditation, certain kinds of music, enlightened gurus, a certain kind of nature-connection, right reading, continual searching AND celebration simultaneously — there are dozens of ways and means to help yourself move more deeply into yourself, move higher into ascending planes of self-realization. Knowledge? No. Experience? Yes. And right reading can be one of the most intense, revelatory experiences you can ever have. It is not for everybody, obviously, only for those to whom an open book is a gateway into the best minds and hearts that have ever lived on.

You don't "read as many books as possible." There are too many books. You have to pick and choose, use your reading time wisely. Seek and find those awakened writers who move you deeply, with whom you resonate sympathetically, and then hang out with them. It is not "knowledge" you are seeking, but direct connection with the best mind-hearts available.

Way to go, M.

Keep-keep-keepin' on!

Best, L

MR

Reading The Wisdom Boys

I regard the Wisdom Boys as my friends. These are the people I like to hang out with. The buddhas are as alive today as they were a decade or a century or 25 centuries ago, because they lived in the eternal moment and spoke from the heart of the timeless present. I enjoy the company of living people too, regular folks, friends, acquaintances, but when I need to be in the atmosphere of genius wedded to compassion, radiance and creativity, well, that's when I hang out with the buddhas.

They help me in my daily life, yes? Conversations, problematic matters, puzzling questions, coping with my own or somebody else's confusion, etc. Sometimes it's their thoughts and insights that help. More often than not, it is nothing in particular, no particular word or thought; it's rather a clarity I have developed as a result of spending time in their presence — that long-term effect I spoke of a while back.

The buddhas have a way of stripping off layers of conditionings. As those blinders fall away, I can see more clearly. I don't see through their eyes. To the contrary, they help me see evermore clearly through my *own* eyes. Great friends, wonderful companions, absolutely a delight to be around.

I had a certain kind of experience with this sort of reading. If I might draw a parallel with dining: You don't eat one meal, and then don't eat anything else for three days, or a week, or a month, right? That first meal certainly tastes good, and fills you up, and gives you nourishment and energy, but just because it did that the first time does not mean you do not need to nourish yourself again thereafter, and on a regular basis.

My experience reading Higher Consciousness writings is that way. If you don't read too much at one time, and if you read every day, then the insights you derive from

the readings go deeper and deeper. If you nourish yourself each day, then that day's reading moves around inside of you, inside your mind and heart, inside your very being, helping you grow. If you miss a few days reading, you can feel yourself becoming less full, using up the energy, becoming more superficial, more brittle, strained.

But if you read a chapter every day, you feel that satisfying nourishment coming into you, and, over a longer period of time, you find your perception beginning to open up, expand and become more penetrating. You begin to change. You not only feel exhilarated on a daily basis, but you feel the substance of that day's reading working its wonders on a more sustained basis at the fundamental perceptual level: you see things more clearly, you feel things more deeply, you become more sensitive, more aware, more loving, kind, compassionate, understanding, insightful. This is one of the ways personal transformation takes place: by being in contact with the buddhas on a daily basis. Does this make sense for you?

In my own, case I started getting up early in the morning, around 5 a.m., while it was still dark, and the house was quiet. Sonia still slept, and the day's other activities had not begun. I'd read for an hour or two. That seemed to be the best time of day for me, and I still do that (although I get up around 7 a.m. these days). The reading is the first thing of the day, while I'm open, receptive, relaxed. That contact with the buddhas does wonders to nourish on an immediate basis, and to alter perception on a long-term basis.

MR Oblivion and Bliss Look Very Much Alike

. . . . You mentioned Ram Dass. He's a good guy, warm-hearted, intelligent, insightful. You also mentioned Wayne Dyer. He is a stimulating, positive, energetic writer, and passes along marvelous quotes from wonderful writers past and present,

both East and West. You also mentioned Suzuki, a great scholar and intellect, albeit somewhat stilted in his writing. All of these are good people, but after reading them I have found myself needing more.

You mentioned Kerouac, and the musics of Tim and Jeff Buckley, Fred Neil, Tim Hardin and David Crosby. I, too, have loved Kerouac and other Beat writers, and loved the musics of these beautiful singers and songwriters as well.

In earlier years, I noticed along the way that these good people and certain others on the same wavelength tend to hang out in pain-ridden psychologically neurotic zones. They have enormous compassion for loss, heartbreak, failure, yearning, broken dreams. They are very bright people, but riddled with torment. Their writings and music are beautiful, but it is the beauty of angst, sadness, confusion, frustration, disappointment.

There is profound affirmation in their loves and joys and passions, and great insight into some of the most brilliant seers and saints of the ages (e.g. Kerouac/Buddha), but in the end they almost inevitably fail to evolve in their own consciousness beyond the earliest narcissistic stages of human development. They remain inwardly divided and in conflict. They rarely come to experience wholeness or the nature of celebration.

As for Higher Consciousness, bliss consciousness, ego-transcendence, etc., well, how can I say it? Oblivion and bliss look very much alike, but they are polar opposites. Unconsciousness and super-consciousness are both non-rational, but they, too, are polar opposites. Dark zone writers, poets and musicians can be incredibly stimulating, but when all is said and done, they cannot help us grow in the transformational ways and directions we have been talking about recently.

You may have already looked into some of the works by people I suggest you check out. Even if you have, I encourage you to look again.

Beginning with the most accessible—

Hermann Hesse: *Steppenwolf* (excellent insight into inner division, and evolution into synthesis); *Siddhartha* (Buddha and Hesse's psycho-spiritual evolution from fragmentation into wholeness and self-actualization); *Journey to the East* (the journey we all take in this mysterious domain called “life”).

Alan Watts remained a boozier and never quite got to a level of integration himself, but was one of the first Westerners to see deeply into Zen; good writer, great sense of humor; understands psycho-spiritual wholeness even if he didn't get there himself; makes the spiritual journey fun. Especially recommend *The Book: On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Are*. Also recommend *Become What You Are*, and another good book of his, *The Wisdom of Insecurity* (especially the chapter on Ego).

Moving deeper and higher—

Osho. Brilliant, controversial, one of the greatest mystics of the past 100 years; also a marvelous way to be introduced to other mystics (such as Buddha, Lao Tzu, Gurdjieff, Zen mystics, dozens of others Osho discussed in his discourses). He has over 200 books out in English. Good places to start: *The Hidden Harmony: Discourses on the Fragments of Heraclitus*; *Hsin Hsin Ming: The Book of Nothing* (Discourses on the faith mind of Sosan); and *The Zen Manifesto: Freedom From Oneself* (his last book, among his best).

Since there are so many books, and several developmental stages Osho went through, I might recommend anything he wrote (actually, spoke) between 1974-1980. If you have questions about other books of his you run across, let me know. I'll offer whatever I can.

You mentioned Buddha's *Dhammapada*. Don't know if you read Thomas Byrom's translation, but it's excellent (Shambhala Pocket Edition).

Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*, Stephen Mitchell's translation (HarperPerennial).

Krishnamurti. He's semi-difficult to read until you come to understand what he means by the terms he uses. Well worth spending time with him. I would recommend *Total Freedom*, a compilation of some of his works. Many of K's complete books are not available, but compilations are. He became progressively more articulate as time went on, so his explication of the various issues during the course of over 50 years of public speaking becomes progressively more clear, precise, understandable, and the compilers select the clearest discourses for the compilations. In recent years, as a result, a number of first-class compilations from his various works have appeared and they hold up well. I mentioned to you *The Urgency of Change* and the *Penguin Readers*, as I recall. Since then, it occurred to me that you might also enjoy two other compilations, *Meeting Life*, and *On Fear*. You might want to start with *Total Freedom*. If he clicks with you, we can talk more. If not, nothing lost.

There's one fellow whom you may wish to read later on. He's a contemporary, a man with a comprehensive scope, brilliant, presently unsurpassed in his understanding of the spectrum of consciousness. He's written many books, and I do not suggest you dive into him right away. He's difficult reading, and you may find you can't relate to him, in which case you would only feel frustrated. If I were to recommend one book to you of his, it might be *No Boundary*; it is most in accord with our discussion and some of the things you have said, and with the other writers mentioned above. In fact, if you can locate it easily, buy it. Keep him in mind as you go along, and maybe check out some of his work if you run across him in a bookstore. His name is Ken Wilber.

Happy sailing, M! Keep me posted—

All the very best,

L

MH

Wilber & *One Taste*

As always, delightful hearing from you. I feel very pleased that you read Wilber's *Sense and Soul*, and that you enjoyed his explorations. As you indicated, you appreciate his efforts and found the book to be a rich source of ideas, insights, and philosophical observations. Thank you for taking the considerable time to let me know your responses to the book and to him. I don't know which of his other books might be in the University library, but everything he's written is engaging. When you are ready to move ahead with him, you might check into either *One Taste* or *A Brief History of Everything*. They're both excellent.

One Taste is a journal he kept for a year; it is more personally oriented than his other writings; at the same time he includes numerous good insights about his AQAL system (All Quadrants, All Levels) and a wide variety of psychological, spiritual and scientific insights. *A Brief History* is a kind of condensation of the main themes explored in *Sex, Ecology and Spirituality*; it has proven to be one of his most accessible and widely read works. I highly recommend it.

I recommend Wilber in particular, not only because I find him both brilliant and interesting, but because I think he will prove extremely valuable to you in your own evolutionary development. You are one of the few people I know who has smarts enough to understand and absorb his writings, and, more significantly, your own thinking can be deepened and expanded immensely by spending time with him. Much of the work you are doing at Oxford, the writers you are reading, the subjects you are studying, the questions you are asking and answering have their unifying connections within Wilber's frameworks. I recommend him, not merely as another good writer, but as someone who may well prove nourishing for you in terms of your expanding personal viewpoints. True, sometimes he requires a little patience and effort, but you can see how he makes it well worthwhile.

You ask why more people haven't heard of this guy. As it turns out, he has a significant following worldwide. He is not mainstream, to be sure; not everybody finds his work accessible; and even fewer people are energetic enough to spend the effort it takes to rise to his level of intellectual rigor. However, among scholars, researchers, and serious explorers of high-level psychological, spiritual, and scientific issues, he is well known, highly respected, and widely read. You may have already looked into some of the sites, but this one in particular gives you lots of info, links, and articles you may want to browse — <http://wilber.shambhala.com>