

The Soft Road

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AGAIN, AGAIN

Some years ago I travelled alone from Sydney to the medieval town of Avila in Spain, to attend a workshop led by author and teacher Caroline Myss. I'd been studying intuition and the development of self-esteem with Caroline for a few years, and this was no small journey, a form of pilgrimage. It was a special opportunity for me to be part of a small group and have a week immersed in learning and reflection with this master teacher.

On the first morning a man walked into the meeting room alongside Caroline Myss. This guest teacher, James Finley, proceeded to make a deep impact on our group from the onset.

During his earlier years as a Trappist monk, James had counted the highly influential monk and author, Thomas Merton, as his spiritual director. He shared with us some of the profound learning and practices he had received from Merton. And one in particular, about reading and reflection, has benefitted me greatly and stays with me to this day.

Much of this teaching is opposite to our current habits around reading for personal development. The self-help market is now a multi-billion dollar business, and most book sales are *repeat* business. We are a tribe of seekers, and if we've purchased one book of this kind, we've likely bought a dozen!

Yet, there is another way, as set out by Thomas Merton and then James Finley. We identify a text, a book, that speaks to us and we read that. Again, again, and again...

The repeated reading and re-reading of a book that speaks to us, again, again, can be much more empowering and impactful than reading many books, always moving on to the next one, and then the next.

The choice of what to read is important, though not prescriptive. This is non-fiction and we choose writing of wisdom—words that inspire us, expand our knowledge, and connect us with our inner grace. It's a personal choice. Finding a "voice" and a style of writing that resonates for us is key. This reading is for joy and enrichment.

Then we begin, and we read one page, only, each day. After reading our page, we reflect on what the words mean for us that day. The next day, we read the next page, we reflect, and so on...until we come to the end of the book, which, depending on the length, could be a few weeks, months, or even a year!

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Take more time, cover less ground.

– Thomas Merton

And then we go back to the start and begin again. Same book, same routine, one page each day, a reflection on the words...

Yet it's not the same. It's a new experience. We read the same words again, from an altered perspective, and we go deeper, easily, without effort. This is repetition but not in a linear way. Imagine instead an upward spiral: as we read and reflect, we grow, upward, expansively, from the inside out.

The act of reading one page and taking a few minutes to reflect is also a short personal stop in our day.

In our busy, externalised world, now more than ever we need methods of going within and establishing our inner knowing. We can then cease thinking we need to always look outside ourselves for answers. This is true empowerment.

Melanie Kirkbride is an exceptional coach and master teacher of Vedic meditation who works with people to empower them to unlock their potential and thrive. [Email us](#) to enquire about Melanie's services, and to receive her Teachings.