

mindset



BY KAREN STEWART, MA

food for thought

There is an old saying “You are what you eat” but I want to take a little spin on that and say “You are what you read.” I love to read and I will pretty much read anything I can get my hands on. If I have a book to read I have the patience of Job—waiting for doctors, at airports, any situation that allows me 5 or 10 minutes to read becomes pleasurable. I have found over the years that when I am reading books that are wise and thoughtful that I am more mindful and my life is enriched. I am taking this opportunity to share with you a few of the books that are my favorites

I'll start with my most recent acquisition: ***Why I Wake Early, New Poems by Mary Oliver***. This slim volume of poems came out in 2004 and has won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry as well as the National Book Award. Mary Oliver has a number of books of poetry and if you do not know her, this is a good place to start. These poems are beautiful renderings of her experience of the natural world. In other books of poetry she has expressed both the joy and the pain of being human, being in relationship, loss, grief, and suffering. Even if you are not usually a fan of poetry, you may well like Mary Oliver's work.

Anything by Thich Nhat Hanh is worth reading, but if you do not know him, I would start with ***Being Peace***. Thich Nhat Hanh is a Buddhist Monk from Vietnam who now lives in France. He was banished from his country and was suspect in ours during the Vietnam war because he traveled internationally advocating peace and nonviolence.

He is wise beyond belief and his books are about achieving inner peace as well as peace in our world.

Meditation is a path toward inner peace and Eknath Easwaran is an excellent guide. His first book ***Meditation*** presents a way of meditating that I have found very helpful. Our western minds are full of chatter and he suggests ways of replacing the chatter with soothing mantras and repetitions of some of the most beautiful spiritual verses from all religious traditions. While he is Hindu, he suggests starting with the memorization and mindful repetition of the Prayer of Saint Francis, which begins: “Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace . . .” Easwaran died a few years ago, but you can receive his “Thought for the Day” each morning for free over the internet from terry.morrison@easwaran.org. I promise the Blue Mountain Retreat Center will not sell your address to anyone else nor will they send any other information about their services. These “thoughts” are a wonderful way to start the day.

I believe that no matter what your spiritual tradition, Buddhist concepts are absolutely in keeping with the best psychology has to offer in terms of achieving happiness and meaning in life. My favorite articulation of these concepts is: ***Awakening the Buddha Within, Eight Steps to Enlightenment***, by Lama Surya Das. I have slowly been reading and re-reading this book for years.

The last three books I want to mention are autobiographical accounts by gifted writers about their particular struggles. Their honest

renderings of their pain and sharing of the wisdom they have gained lifts me up and gives me hope. ***Let Your Life Speak, Listening for the Voice of Vocation***, a book by Parker J. Palmer is the story of how this Quaker educator came to discover from within his true work. He is also the author of ***The Courage to Teach***.

Traveling Mercies by Anne Lamont is the story of her journey from addiction to a spiritual home that supports and sustains her. She is very funny and irreverent and I use more “one-liners” from this book than any other. For instance, this gem: “Being angry at someone is like eating rat poison and waiting for the rat to die.”

And finally, ***Kitchen Table Wisdom*** by Rachel Naomi Remen is just that: the wisdom she has accumulated as she has struggled with chronic illness and become a physician who focuses on the whole person.

All of these books are like old friends, from time to time I remember phrases and bits of wisdom or humor from them. They are part of me now. I humbly offer them to you with the hope that you will enjoy them. Finally a plug for our wonderful local bookstore, ***The Regulator on Ninth Street***, a perfect place to find these books and to make sure we continue to have this wonderful and unique resource in our neighborhood. 📖

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